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Anna Rutherford
University of Aarhus, Denmark

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Abstract

Full text of issue.

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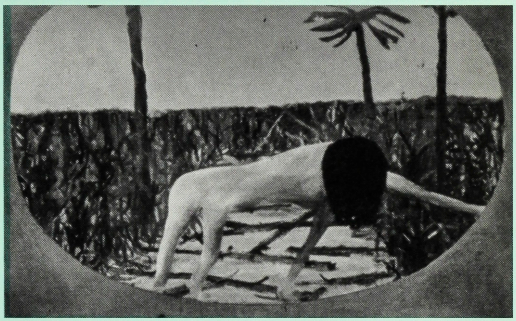
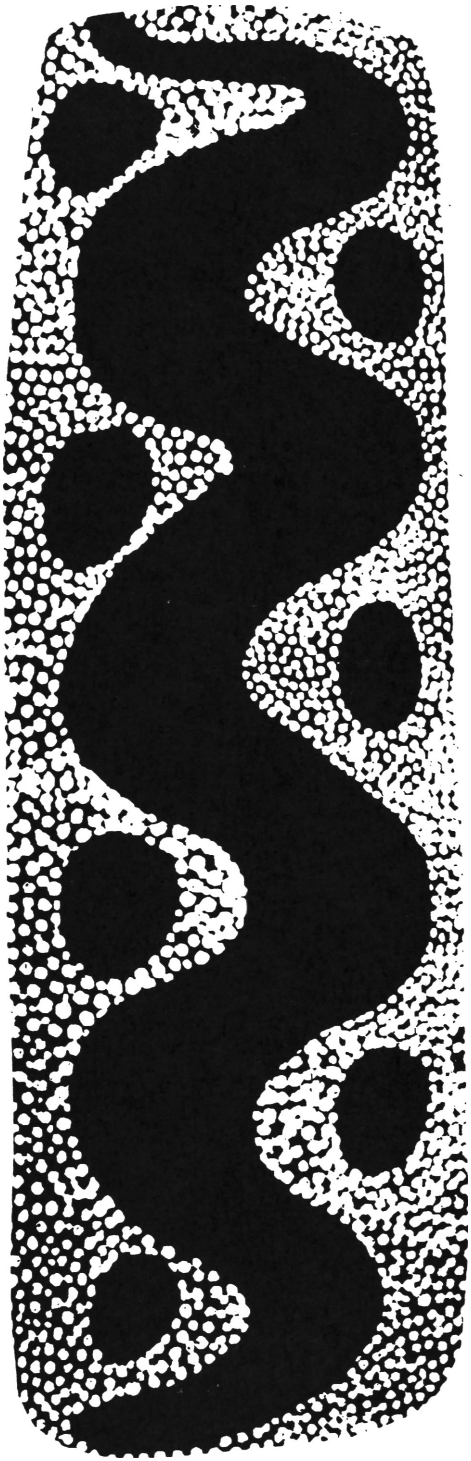


Patrick White
A Fringe of Leaves

MICHAEL ALEXANDER

MRS FRASER ON THE FATAL SHORE

Shipwreck and scandal -
the true story that shocked the world!



KUNAPIPI

VOLUME XI NUMBER 2
1989

Kunapipi is a tri-annual arts magazine with special but not exclusive emphasis on the new literatures written in English. It aims to fulfil the requirements T.S. Eliot believed a journal should have: to introduce the work of new or little known writers of talent, to provide critical evaluation of the work of living authors, both famous and unknown, and to be truly international. It publishes creative material and criticism. Articles and reviews on related historical and sociological topics plus film will also be included as well as graphics and photographs.

The editor invites creative and scholarly contributions. Manuscripts should be double-spaced with footnotes gathered at the end, should conform to the MHRA (Modern Humanities Research Association) Style Sheet, and should be accompanied by a return envelope.

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Anna Rutherford
Editor - KUNAPIPI
Department of English
University of Aarhus
8000 Aarhus C
Denmark

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Kunapipi refers to the Australian Aboriginal myth of the Rainbow Serpent which is the symbol both of creativity and regeneration. The journal's emblem is to be found on an Aboriginal shield from the Roper River area of the Northern Territory in Australia.

CONTENTS

KAY SCHAFFER

Australian Mythologies: The Eliza Fraser Story and Constructions of the Feminine in Patrick White's *A Fringe of Leaves* and Sidney Nolan's 'Eliza Fraser' Paintings

INTRODUCTION

When I first read Patrick White's novel *A Fringe of Leaves* (1976) some years ago I was interested in the incredible story of hardship and survival of a woman in the Australian bush. This so-called historical novel tells the story of the 1836 shipwreck off what is now the Queensland coast, the captivity and death of its crew members among the Aborigines and the story of the heroine's, Mrs Ellen Roxburgh, sole survival and eventual escape with Jack Chance, an escaped convict with whom she shares a final bush idyll before returning to Sydney and, eventually, London society. The novel has received widespread critical acclaim by critics in Australia and abroad. Apart from, or in addition to, the so-called historical dimensions of the novel, it has been interpreted as one of many in the White canon which presents the solitary individual in search of an ultimate insight through his or her confrontation with the terrifying metaphysical geography of the mind, soul and spirit. In the case of *A Fringe of Leaves*, that individual is the simple, sensual Cornish girl, Ellen Gluyas, who marries Austin Roxburgh, a sickly but mannered gentleman, and is seemingly transformed into a genteel lady by his efforts and those of his mother. Her captivity among the Aborigines, which culminates in an act of cannibalism in which she participates and views as sacramental, leads her back to the dark, instinctual side of her nature.

During that first reading I was concerned with and a little distrustful of the assumptions underlying White's telling of the tale - a tale which pits nature against civilisation, the instinctual self against the social self, the woman, her Aboriginal captors and her convict rescuer against co-

lonial white society, the city against the bush. I was also keen to know more about the actual events on which the novel is based.

A novel is not history and this novel, in particular, takes only its barest cues from history. Nonetheless, the canon of scholarship surrounding the novel and its treatment by many commentators draw attention to the parallels between the historical event and its fictional representation. A novel is not history and Patrick White's novel makes no pretences at being so. Yet one of the things it shares in common with other representations of the originating event is that it, like the historical narratives, fictional accounts and artistic representations that preceded it as well as the film, novel and reconstructed histories which have come in its wake, all mythologize the woman and place her in service to a larger cause - be it Christianity, colonialism, patriarchy, Australian nationalism, modernist humanism or the prurient interests of a modern film-viewing public. A novel is not history and yet it seems curious that none of the many representations of this particular historical event view it from what might be imagined as 'her' side, whether 'she' be Eliza Fraser, the historical personage, Ellen Gluyas Roxburgh, her fictional counterpart in *A Fringe of Leaves*, the 'disquieting muse' of Sidney Nolan's 'Mrs Fraser' series of paintings or the ribald Eliza Fraser of the 1976 Australian film and novel of the same name.[1] In all of them, the woman is imagined as an essentially natural, sensual, instinctual creature who excites the reader's or viewer's interest in being alien, exotic and strange. It seems as if, as a result of the reported historical experiences, the fictionally reconstructed woman becomes acceptable to modern readers only as an 'other' in relation to 'us'; what 'we' are not but expect 'woman' to be.

In this us-and-them construction I am borrowing the self-other distinctions employed by Edward Said in his study *Orientalism* and applying them to our purposes here and adding to the discussion a certain post-Lacanian critical interest in the construction of 'femininity' as otherness in relation to masculine sexuality and the dynamics of desire. In this paper I would like to utilize these ideas to explore the mythologizing of Eliza Fraser in her many disguises and to consider the factors which give rise to the gap between what might be understood as the real conditions of a woman's life and the imagined woman/women of the various narratives.

To be fair, it must be said that Patrick White's novel provides us with a most complex narrative construction of character and culture. The representation of Ellen Roxburgh's split subjectivity arising out of a number of self-other distinctions is one in which the binary oppositions which construct and maintain the unified self are constantly conflated and ultimately transgressed. Several critics have provided insightful

analyses of these inter-relationships between language, culture, the self and the production of meaning.[2] But fundamental to the novel is the idea of Woman as enigma and mystery - which is, of course, a founding myth of Patriarchy.

PATRIARCHAL INTERPRETATIONS: HOW TO REDRESS?

Had I been writing this paper as a feminist critic at the time of publication of the novel in 1976 two major directions in feminist criticism would have been available to me: I could have attempted some primary historical research in hopes of recovering the lost woman, the 'real' and potentially heroic Eliza Fraser, to history; or I might have set to work on the texts, paintings and film themselves, uncovering their masculine biases and casting aspersions on the heads of the likes of Patrick White, Sidney Nolan and David Williamson for their patriarchal misrepresentations of the 'real' Eliza Fraser, their failure to tell 'the truth'. Now that I'm a feminist critic in a post-modern and (I'm told) a post-feminist age those directions no longer seem adequate. In the first place, there is no 'real' Eliza Fraser to recover in the annals of history - only more and more layers of motivated discourse. In the second place, it is not enough to view Eliza Fraser only and essentially as a woman (and potentially a heroine at that). Other factors are significant: her race (a white woman amongst Aboriginal natives); her class status (one of assumed middle class authority amidst an ex-convict and working class crew); her patriarchal position (she was the wife of an ailing captain and aunt to the ship's second mate); her historical position within British imperialism (she was, it seems, born and raised in Ceylon and thus saw herself as a daughter of the British Raj) and colonialism (she travelled on a trading ship which also took emigrant families from Britain to colonial Australia); and the biological contingencies of her situation (she was pregnant when she left Liverpool and gave birth seven months later while floundering at sea in an open boat five days after the wreck to a child which drowned shortly after birth. Thus, she was in a post-partum condition throughout the time of her captivity). These factors also have bearing on and interact with her gender position, sometimes in contradictory ways. In the third place, the various mythological reconstructions of Eliza Fraser were not the authentic creations of Patrick White, Sidney Nolan or David Williamson. Rather, those men were responding to what already existed in the sign systems of their culture. They created 'their' women out of the category of 'the feminine' already available to them through existing cultural discourses. Further, they allowed the idea of Eliza Fraser as an object of desire to

circulate between them and within their narratives, even if disguised as a quest for historical accuracy or psychological truth.

So, if I can't have the pleasure of recovering the lost woman to history because all history is representation and if I can't have the satisfaction of blaming the men for their biased portrayals what can I do? I will have to adopt an approach which accepts that history is discursive and that texts are the effects of available discourses and motivated by the subjectivities of their authors. And I will need to ask as I read: who speaks, for whom and by what authority? It may not be so bad. I may not learn much more about the real Eliza Fraser but a great deal more about the inter-relationships between language, culture, desire and the self.

HISTORY AS TRUTH: SOME CONSIDERATIONS

I cannot reconstruct the history of what happened between and within the various characters as they faced shipwreck, mutiny, captivity and death. I cannot, not because there are too many stories and not enough time; nor because, in the words of the latest historians of the event, 'the main actors, for reasons of their own, did not tell the whole truth' (Dwyer and Buchanan, p. 1); nor because there are too many discrepancies between 'fact' and 'fiction' to be reconciled - but because the 'facts' don't take us very far. There is no truth to be found behind the many conflicting accounts, the tissued layers of interpretive history.

What is interesting, however, is that for every commentator on the event, whether he (or in one case she) be an artist, literary critic, historian or novelist, two common elements occur:

1) a focus on Eliza Fraser and not the other seven (male) survivors of the wreck and captivity and
2) an interest in her sexuality, and particularly on what did happen or might have happened in the brief time between her husband's death at the hands of her captors and the time of her official rescue.

The fact that she is a woman, and therefore a creature of the flesh, provides an unquestioned framework for the various authors. The woman and her sexuality come together as 'our' enigma and mystery.

The writers ponder the burning question : 'Did she or didn't she?' And if she did, 'Where, when and with whom?' And 'Did she provoke, desire, seduce or resist?' 'Was she raped?' is never seriously considered,

although had Anne Summers taken up the event in her feminist history, *Damned Whores and God's Police*, it surely would have been.

There is both a gap and a supplement in the textual constructions regarding her captivity and her rescue which provoke these questions. The gap is created in historical terms by an absence of data or corroborated evidence as to what may have happened at the time. The supplement is a story of her rescue by the convict David Bracefell and the couple's extended bush idyll together, to which both Sidney Nolan and Patrick White refer in their work but is a story which appears to be without historical foundation. The gap has provided a tantalizing silence for writers, artists, historians, public figures and convicts alike, all of whom have attempted to supplement it with sexual fantasy and desire.

'Did she or didn't she?', they ponder. Patrick White says 'She did': with her husband's brother before the shipwreck and with her convict rescuer thereafter, and both she and we (presumably) are so much the better for it. Michael Alexander, the main twentieth century historian of the event, doesn't know and is clearly bothered by this. He complains (in a statement that would be interesting to deconstruct) that: 'It is clear that she had some unpleasant experiences, but her inconsistency and natural reticence in encountering them has led to a lack of credible information on the subject. Her most reliable biographer [he complains] ... is aggravatingly unspecific about her sexual adventures' (Alexander, p. 63). In other words, we don't know. What we do know is that the unofficial reports of her rescue and sexual liaison during a lengthy trek back to Moreton Bay by the ex-convict David Bracefell are without foundation, although historians still speculate that Bracefell may have been briefly involved as a helpmate to her official rescuer, John Graham (Dwyer and Buchanan, pp. 15-6). We don't know, but Alexander suggests, that the corroboree which was reported to be in progress at the time of her official rescue by a government party may have been intended as a ceremony to consign her as wife to the head of the tribe. In terms of Aboriginal custom, it is likely that a white woman living with the natives would be consigned a male member of the tribe after the death of her husband to give her a place in the tribal community and some degree of protection. Whether or not these women were generally married to 'the chief' at the time of a corroboree organised for this purpose, as is customarily suggested in white versions of the captivity narrative, is a matter open for speculation. In the case of Eliza Fraser, the corroboree version of her rescue appears in several histories under provocative headings like 'saved in the nick of time' or 'rescued from a fate worse than death' - thus creating a submerged and racially charged sub-text to the various reconstructions.

We also know that during the time of her rescue at Moreton Bay her attending physician reported that she was obsessed with the fear that she might be pregnant. And the Commandant's official report recounts that Mrs Fraser complained to John Graham, her rescuer, that 'the white men she met were worse than the blacks'. Which white men she met, where and when all remain a mystery. These slim slips of evidence within the official and unofficial records are all that exist to fuel the fires of speculation. None of it suggests that Eliza Fraser was a willing partner in a sexual encounter. In fact, if anything, to me at least, it suggests quite the opposite. But the mystery, the enigma of the woman and her sexuality, invites myth. It has always been so. And with myth, the woman becomes the archetypal Other for man.

Recorded events of her difficult life during her six weeks of captivity amongst the tribe are said to be recounted with some fidelity to the historical evidence in Patrick White's novel *A Fringe of Leaves* although the interpretations and meanings given to the events in the novel as well as the construction of Ellen Roxburgh's character depart dramatically from the historical foundations (Ward, 404 ff). On the transposition of fiction from history, White has commented that 'if I hadn't substituted Ellen Roxburgh for Eliza Fraser, little more than a hardbitten shrew from the Orkneys, [the novel would not] have had the psychological complexities, the sensibility, and the passion I was able to explore' (Hassall, 7). White's account, however, largely because of its accessibility and popularity, has supplanted what was known or devised about the originating event in the minds of modern readers.

Narrative supplements and comes to stand in the place of the event. The 'real' Eliza Fraser cannot be rescued from those narratives. It is possible, however, to register the fact that dominant although shifting interests are always brought to bear on and are involved in their constructions. In each of them her sex (as a woman) is central. In each, the question 'Did she or didn't she?' arises. One can tease out of the texts the effects of this gap in knowledge (which on another level all narrative seeks to fill) which results in the continued circulation of ideas about femininity within masculine culture.

The Eliza Fraser story has had several revivals in the twentieth century, the most significant of which for an Australian as well as an international audience have been: Michael Alexander's history, *Mrs Fraser and the Fatal Shore* (1971); Sidney Nolan's 'Mrs Fraser' series of paintings (three series: 1947-8, 1956-7, 1964); Patrick White's novel, *A Fringe of Leaves* (1976), and to a lesser extent, David Williamson's and Tim Burstall's screenplay/film, *Eliza Fraser* (Hexagon Films, 1976), reconstructed as a novel by Kenneth Cook (1976). Alexander's history functions to place the event within an historical field. It becomes a point of

reference concerning questions of historical truth for future commentators. Nolan's paintings and White's novel reshape the history and place the story within the narratives of Australian nationalism.[3] Within this discourse, the alien landscape of the untamed Australian bush becomes the threat, both physical and psychic, which must be recognized and accommodated. The Canadian poet, Michael Ondaatje's, long poem 'The Man with Seven Toes' (1969) and Andre Brink's South African novel, *An Instant In the Wind* (1976), also take the Eliza Fraser story, but as it has been represented through Nolan's paintings, as their point of departure.[4]

It is remarkable that all of these twentieth century textual reconstructions of the Eliza Fraser story occur within a narrow band of time, between 1969 and 1976. Through drama, film, art and fiction the event in Australia has become a part of an emerging nationalism associated in the early 1970's with the Whitlam era in politics. Within an international sphere it can be located as a part of the emerging discourses of post-colonialism and feminism, although the texts themselves can be read as anti-feminist, as this paper has suggested. The 1970's were a time of changing social relations between the sexes and changing power relations between colonial and post-colonial societies, colonized and colonizing peoples. Yet, Eliza Fraser, in her various forms, is never constructed as a hero or spokesperson for the dispossessed. Rather, as this essay will soon show, she signifies an old order of femininity. In each of the texts she remains tied to nature, the instincts and the sensual as an object of fear or desire for men within masculine culture. In all the representations she is a troublesome 'other': quarrelsome, indulgent, overbearing and difficult in Alexander's history; sensual, alien, animal-like and tied to nature in Nolan's paintings; lusty, bold, fickle and untrustworthy in Williamson and Burstall's film and Cook's novel. White's portrayal is more complex but equally insistent on her sexuality, her instinctual nature, her links to the physical world. All depict her as a betrayer of men.

These retellings and repetitions of the Eliza Fraser story occur in Australia at a time when the Women's Movement is exerting considerable force within the culture; when women's demands for political, social and economic equality are visible and widely reported; and when feminism begins to challenge masculine perspectives, including those which link women to nature and men to culture. Yet no feminist historian, artist, writer or critic takes up the event. No example attempts to present the character as a 1970's-style feminist hero: a woman endowed with courage and fortitude who suffered extreme privations, including shipwreck, starvation, captivity, sexual exploitation and possibly rape - and survived. On the contrary, the extant representations of

Eliza Fraser and the event reassert a femininity firmly inscribed within masculine systems of representation. Taken together they partake of a reactionary force within Australian nationalism quite in opposition to currents within Australian feminism. The effect is to retard the changing currents of history and reassert an ideology of male dominance and female submission. The cross currents within and between the various discourses of Australian nationalism, feminism and post-colonialism deserve further attention.

In an insightful article which studies the story as a post-colonial enabling myth within an international context A.J. Hassall writes:

> Nolan, White and Brink perceive in the stories a myth which embodies the archetypal confrontations between the European consciousness and the virgin continent, between the 'civilized' white settler and the 'natural' black inhabitant, between imprisonment and freedom, between woman and man on the edge of survival in the antipodean wilderness, and between suffering and the individual soul.

He concludes that each of these artists fashion their confrontations as 'an enabling myth for their respective post-colonial societies' (Hassall, 4). That is, they portray white civilization conquering the physical, psychological, moral and political threats presented by the alien land. In Hassall's article Eliza Fraser, or Ellen Roxburgh, becomes an everyman character charting a post-colonial territory for modern readers. I recommend the article to you. At the same time I want to question the concept of Eliza Fraser as an everyman character and detail some of the ways in which the central female character as everyman also becomes an everywoman as 'other' in the reconstructions.

REPRESENTATIONS OF THE FEMININE

Each of the artists under consideration, although divided by nationality, academic discipline and mode of address utilize already present assumptions about Western femininity to fashion their heroine. Alexander, for example, presents the historical Eliza Fraser as a dominating wife and a bad mother who deserved her fate. His tone is often disparaging, patronizing and callous. He also suggests a sensual nature to Mrs Fraser quite early in the narrative by commenting that a contemporary sketch of the woman reveals a 'handsome dark-haired lady whose strong features and mobile mouth suggest contradiction between duty and indulgence' (p. 18).

You might want to consider the sketch which prompts this remark [illus. 1]. How strong is the contradiction between duty and indulgence

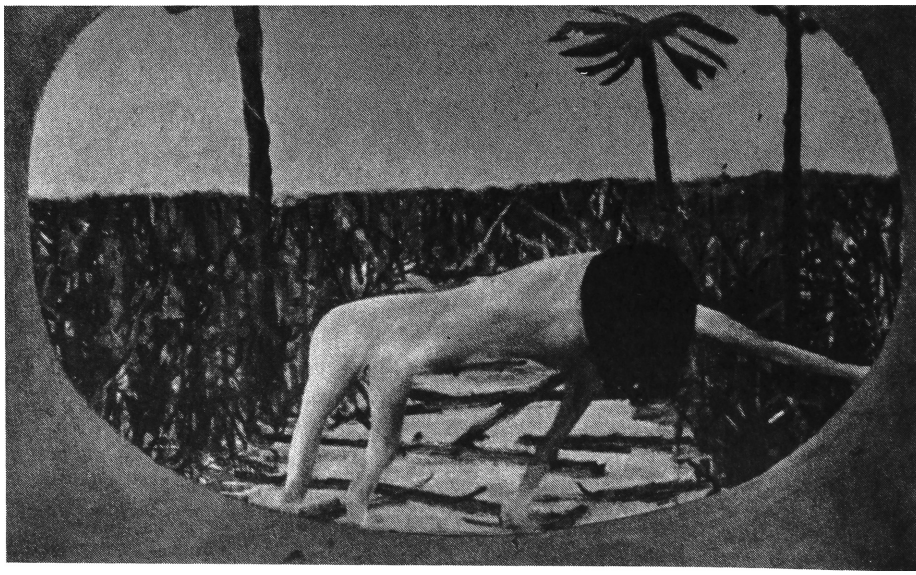
Illus. 1: Eliza Fraser.

for you? The supposition has its uses. It allows Alexander later in the text to speculate on her possibly sexual interest in one of her male (native) captors and an attachment to one of them which 'might be more romantic than she admits' (p. 64). Jill Ward, in an early article which compares White's fiction with Alexander's history comments that White may have been stimulated by this aspect of Mrs Fraser which led to his 'similar contradiction between sense and sensuality' in Ellen Gluyas/Roxburgh (404). But the supposition remains an interpolation by Alexander from a visual cue for which he has no historical or factual evidence. Yet Jill Ward is labelled by a more contemporary historian as Eliza Fraser's 'most feminist' commentator, presumably because she was the only woman to write of the event (Ryan, 103), and the mobile mouth becomes a face which contains 'a strange combination of purity and wantonness, virtue and lust' (Cook, p. 7) for the novelist of the film version.

The importance of a modern reading of visual cues has been spurred throughout by Sidney Nolan's powerfully evocative paintings in his 'Mrs Fraser' series. Nolan took up the theme of Eliza Fraser on three occasions. The first in 1947-8 resulted in twelve large paintings including the 'Mrs Fraser' illustrated here [illus. 2]. It appeared on the hardback jacket cover of Michael Alexander' s history and also on the cover of a popular catalogue of Nolan' s paintings, *Sidney Nolan's Paradise Garden*, edited by Robert Melville. Another painting from Nolan's second series, 'Mrs Fraser and Bracefell' [illus . 3], was chosen for the first edition cover of *A Fringe of Leaves*.

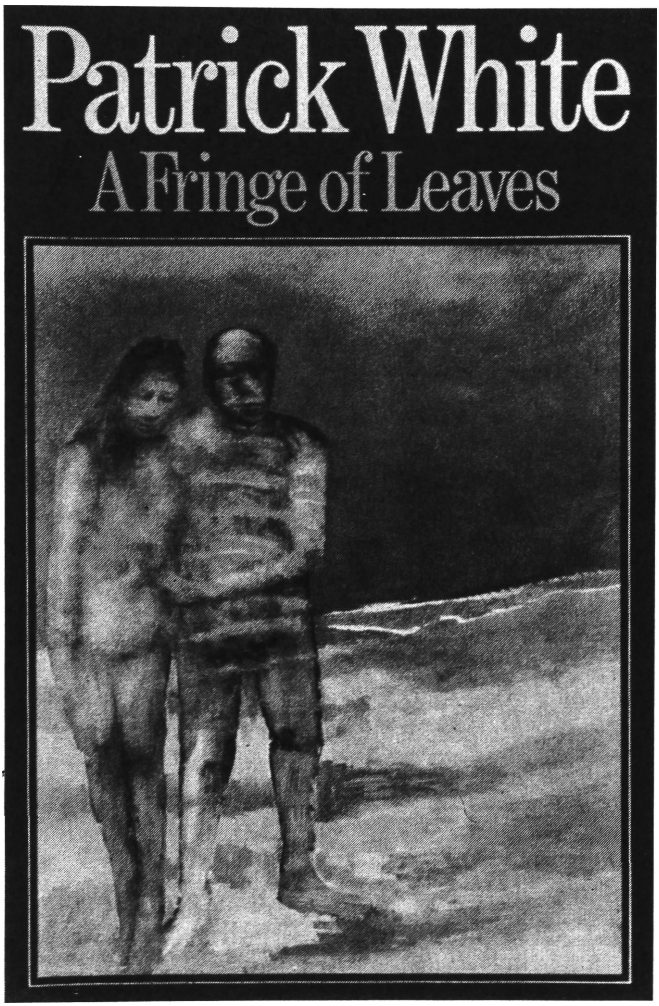
In the first instance Mrs Fraser is portrayed as a naked animal blending into the alien bush. Robert Melville suggests that Nolan identified with the convict, Bracefell, through this particularly provocative image. He continues,

> her plight arouses not pity but the sense of her openness to sexual assault. She is a woman liable to be taken from behind, like the women in some of the Pompeiian wall paintings, with no preference and no certainty on the part of the taker as to which passage is being penetrated. She would spit and snap like a female dingo, without offering resistance. (p. 7)



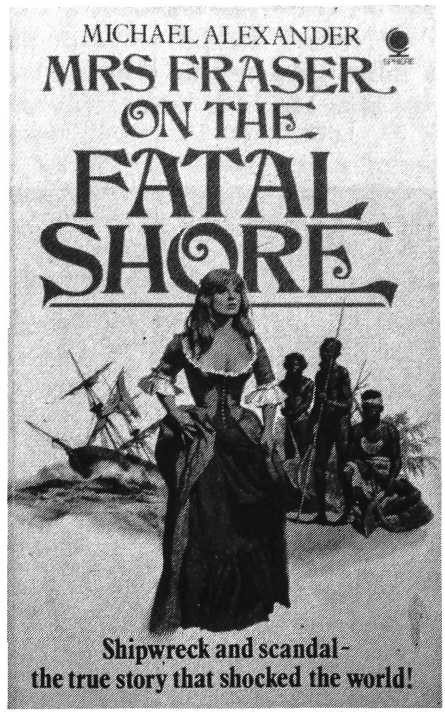
Illus. 2: Sidney Nolan, 'Mrs Fraser', 1947.

For Melville and other art critics she is Nolan' s 'disquieting muse' who becomes, especially in Nolan's second series of paintings (1955-6), an Australian Eve in a fallen garden who will eventually betray her rescuer, Bracefell. She is, says Melville, 'necessarily evil' (p. 9).



Illus. 3: Cover of Patrick White, *A Fringe of Leaves*: 'Mrs Fraser and Bracefell'.

Although the 1976 film 'Eliza Fraser' bears little relation to its historical point of reference, being a comic sexual farce playing on the popularity of its 'Tom Jones' model, it does effectively reinforce the by now established stereotype of Eliza Fraser as a seductress and betrayer.



Illus. 4: Cover of Michael Alexander, *Mrs Fraser and the Fatal Shore.*

It also heralds the reissue of Michael Alexander's history, *Mrs Fraser and the Fatal Shore,* in a paper-back edition with [no surprises here] a film rush photo illustration of Susannah York in a provocatively low cut, garnet satin dress on the cover [illus. 4] and yet another novel, Kenneth Cook's *Eliza Fraser,* described as 'a rollicking tale of lust and adventure from the violent bawdy-colonial past' (dust jacket quotation cited in Ryan, 107).

In all of these examples several common elements prevail. The woman, shaped by prior discourses of patriarchy, Christianity and colonialism, becomes the repository for the myth of original sin. I refer not to the woman herself but to the Woman as symbolic Other of Western discourse. Associated with nature and sensuality she becomes an object/other on the fatal shore in opposition to the self seeking the safe harbour of civilization and reason. She is feared, reviled and blamed for her fate. If aspects of her questing nature make her an everyman acting out a myth for mankind, those aspects of her sensual femininity also and at the same time make her an Other for man.

There are other issues here. Much is at stake in this myth which comes to life at the interstices of post-colonialism, Australian nationalism and feminism. One issue is the absence of a 1970's feminist analysis, or a story told from 'her' side. This 'voice' has been supplemented historically by a surfeit of femininity, that is, a woman constructed through comfortable and acceptable platitudes about Woman which have informed the dominant discourses of Western cultures for at least two centuries.[5] Another is the absence of stories coming from the position of other crew members who survived the wreck: the sailors who mutinied, those who were separated from the Captain's party, the loyal black slave from the Carribean who supported the Frasers against the interests of the others throughout the ordeal, and the twelve year old boy. These gaps in the history have several effects.

Mrs Fraser's story is told. She enters history, even if only within masculine constructions and categories of femininity. The rest do not make it. Although male, and thus the proper subjects of history, none of them could be fashioned by the available discourses into a proper hero. Each, but for different reasons, was barred from this category - some by their class status, others by their anti-authoritarian actions, still others by their race or age. Eliza Fraser's representation in the histories, novels, film and poem, constructed with reference to cultural categories of femininity, enhances already available belief systems and values in the culture - as does the absence of the other voices.

When read as an effect of Australian nationalism this Eliza Fraser of the various mythic reconstructions is not unlike at least two other historical actors in Australia whose stories arise out of and have serviced a national mythology. I refer to Louisa Lawson (until recently the much reviled mother of Henry Lawson, the nationalist writer identified with the *Bulletin* in the 1890's) and Lindy Chamberlain (the woman who claimed that a dingo took her baby at Ayer's Rock and has become one of Australia's most recent scapegoats in an enduring national mythology). Both these women, sisters under the skin, share a similar fate to the mythic Eliza. In each case, the narrative and visual representations of their lives and actions have supplemented and become the 'reality'. And those representations bear little relation to the historical evidence. All three women have been constructed as bad mothers whose dominant personalities led to their own desperate lives. All three have been judged blameworthy and their actions sighted as affronts to the nation. In each case, there remains a considerable gap between what can be reasonably assumed about the actual woman from the historical evidence and the woman as represented in the nation's mythology. In each case the dominant race, class and gender codes of meaning within Aus-

tralian culture have been activated against the interests of actual women but in the service of Australian nationalism.

One can never know the 'real' Eliza or Louisa or Lindy - not because the first two are lost to history, but because, whether dead or alive, when they enter history they become the effects of discourse. But we can challenge the assumptions that historical narratives represent 'the truth'. Returning to Hassall's comment, if the Eliza Fraser story has become an enabling myth for post-colonial society, it can also be read as a cautionary tale. I believe that more and more readers are preferring to read it that way.

NOTES

1. The full title of the film is, ironically, 'A Faithful Narrative of the Capture, Sufferings and Miraculous Escape of Eliza Fraser', although it is generally referred to by the abbreviated title, 'Eliza Fraser'.
2. See, for example, Hena Maes-Jelinek, 'Fictional Breakthrough and the Unveiling of "Unspeakable Rites" in Patrick White's *A Finge of Leaves* and Wilson Harris' *Yurokon*', *Kunapipi* 2,2 (1980), 33-43, and Diana Brydon, '"The Thematic Ancestor": Joseph Conrad, Patrick White and Margaret Atwood', *World Literature Written In English*, 24, 2 (1984), 386-79.
3. For a more detailed discussion of masculine and feminine constructions in relation to Australian national identity see my book, *Women and the Bush. Forces of Desire in the Australian Cultural Tradition* (Sydney: Cambridge University Press, 1988).
4. Ondaatje includes the following explanation of the event at the conclusion of his text:

   > Mrs Fraser was a Scotish lady who was shipwrecked on what is now Fraser Island, off the Queensland coast. She lived for 6 months among the aborigines, rapidly losing her clothes, until she was discovered by one Bracefell, a deserting convict who himself had hidden for 10 years among the primitive Australians. The lady asked the criminal to restore her to civilization, which he agreed to do if she would promise to intercede for his free pardon from the Governor. The bargain was sealed, and the couple set off inland.
   >
   > At first sight of European settlement, Mrs Fraser rounded on her benefactor and threatened to deliver him up to justice if he did not immediately decamp. Bracefell returned disillusioned to the hospitable bush, and Mrs Fraser's adventures aroused such admiring interest that on her return to Europe she was able to exhibit herself at 6d a showing in Hyde Park.
   >
   > Colin MacInnes

   This is the legend surrounding the event to which both Ondaatje and Brink had reference. It has been proven to be without historical foundation. It appears in Colin MacInnes' introduction to the catalogue *Sydney Nolan. Catalogue of an Exhibition of Palntings from 1947 to 1957 held at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, June to July, 1957.*

5. This is not to suggest that feminist interpretations favourable to Mrs Fraser would have escaped these discursive categories, although they might have inverted or challenged them, nor that Eliza Fraser could ever be an easy heroine for our times, bound as she was by her own upper-class and racially charged colonial attitudes. The question here is not one of truth, but of who speaks, for whom and by what authority.

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Kirsten Holst Petersen

A FANTASY

Everybody agrees on the effect of sun on white skin.
It seems only you knew it.
'Get me out of here, just get me out of here, fast - it hurts!
Back to beds and baths and, yes, tea.'
Wouldn't you?

But no! a lot of soul searching among cannibals
and better still,
a masochistic dream machine,
fantasy of fucking,
a bitch on heat,
bleeding your sex into the land,
becoming all soulful and symbolic.

I would have preferred you to chew gum and pack a gun,
but we couldn't have that, could we?
What would happen to symbolic baptisms
and cannibalistic depths of the soul?

What would we have called Fraser Island?

HELEN M. GILBERT

The Prison and the Font: An Essay on Patrick White's *A Fringe of Leaves*

In *A Fringe of Leaves*, Patrick White presents a vision of a woman's struggle for self-knowledge and freedom as she experiences life from almost every stratum of society in the early Australian penal colony. Prompted by instinct and necessity, Ellen Roxburgh gradually explores the depths of her 'heart of darkness' when a shipwreck forces her to leave the company of the 'moral classes' and mix with Aborigines and convicts before returning to white civilization. Her journey is punctuated by images of baptism reflecting ritual initiations into new life; however, these images are often accompanied by reminders of the individual and societal forces which imprison *humankind* and restrict *our* freedom and understanding. By combining variations of metaphorical baptism with prison imagery, White suggests that *our* ability to experience symbolic rebirth is limited while *our* quest for the freedom it brings is difficult and ongoing.

Even before the shipwreck, Ellen undergoes an important initiation when the harsh realities of the penal society gradually stir her to confront her own potential for evil, an essential step towards self-knowledge. She does this by identifying with the convicts, a gradual process which enables her to view society from a different perspective, asserting that evil is relative as well as socially defined. On first seeing prisoners while she is on the way to Dulcet, Ellen experiences a 'pang of commiseration' for them (p. 75), and she is uncomfortably conscious of some common bond of depravity which links her to these 'wretches'. As suggested by the refreshing shower of rain which follows, this incident marks her induction into a new, albeit improperly developed, level of self-awareness. Thereafter, she ponders over the convicts and begins to empathize with them even though she has 'lost the art of common speech' and is conscious of the social barriers which separate the two groups (p. 91). The prisoners' suffering, along with the hypocritical attitudes she perceives among members of the upper classes, leads her to question society's definition of right and wrong and to suspect that her

token Christian faith no longer insulates her from wrong-doings or offers a panacea to all ills. Having acknowledged her vulnerability and imperfections, Ellen is prepared to undergo a symbolic rebirth. Prompted by visions of penal brutality, the 'whip crack' and 'pistol shot' (p. 98), she plunges into the hidden depths of her own nature to clarify the strong sense of foreboding which the prisoners' predicament elicits in her. She links the feeling with the odd presentiment of personal evil which led her, as a young woman, to travel to St Hya's Well and immerse herself in the black water. Ellen's recollections of this mythical font of her youth evoke images of a ritual baptism; her past action of diving into the well forms an analogue for her present attempts to confront the darker side of her nature and exorcize the evil she senses lurking there. However, as she herself realizes, the 'sacrament' is limited. Unable to re-experience the cleansing powers of St Hya's Well, she is left foundering in the depths, 'faced with her own vulnerable image, swimming at her from the mirrors' of a dark house (p. 98). This is the first of a series of ambiguous baptisms that accompany Ellen's probings into the darker side of her nature.

Ellen's confrontation with personal evil brings her a small measure of freedom, allowing her repressed sexual urges to emerge in a brief sordid moment. As she explores a 'green fathomless sea' of sensuality with Garnet (p. 103), the 'instrument' she uses for 'measuring [her] depths' (p. 104), she undergoes another metaphorical baptism and an instant of ecstasy; but, ironically, the freedom she obtains is quickly outweighed by remorse and self-loathing, and she feels trapped in a conflict between her own sexual longings and the morality that she is expected to conform to. She longs to flee from Van Dieman's Land and the penal colony which prompts painful reminders of her unguarded lust. Moreover, she imagines herself to be an escaped convict who may not 'survive to enjoy [her] freedom' (p. 111). Later, the prison imagery surrounding her initiation into sensuality intensifies when she dreams of being lashed with her braids which are 'turned into knotted cords' (p. 140), resembling the 'cat' that punishes errant convicts. These images suggest that Ellen is struggling to come to terms with a prison of her own making where her conscience is her jailer. Her subconscious need for atonement restricts her ability to view her affair with Garnet as a small but necessary step toward ultimate freedom.

Ellen's next and most important ritual baptism takes her another step closer to freedom even though it occurs during her stay on the island where her metaphorical imprisonment is emphasized by a literal one. Paradoxically, she is both captured and freed ('unhooked') by a tribe of Aborigines and the hunger and suffering she experiences at their hands allow her to fulfill the convict role that she has already taken on im-

aginatively. Through this role, she is able to expiate her sins and begin seeking a new identity. Stripped of the vestiges of *civilized* life, she discards the mask of upper class morality, rejects the God imposed upon her by the Roxburghs and searches for the natural divinity she embraced with only limited understanding in her youth when 'rocks had been her altars and spring water her sacrament' (p. 222). At first, faced with a hostile environment where 'the spirits of place [are] not hers to conjure up' (p. 222), Ellen fears that this mystical religion may only be available to the natives. However, after a series of ritual anointings suggesting the initial stages of baptism, she experiences a transcendental union with the Aborigines and the 'spirits of place' when she eats the flesh of a young tribal girl. This incident is described in terms which stress religious rebirth: the glen where the feast occurs resembles a cathedral with its 'pinnacles' and 'arches' (p. 242), the Aborigines have an air akin to 'communicants' (p. 243), and Ellen herself 'believe[s] that she had partaken of a sacrament' (p. 244). Furthermore, she recalls St Hya's Well once more and draws a direct parallel between the two incidents, suggesting that her recent reception of the 'eucharist' completes the symbolic baptism begun with the anointings:

> Just as she would never have admitted to others how she had immersed herself in the saint's pool, or that its black waters had cleansed her of morbid thoughts and sensual longings, so she could not have explained how tasting flesh from the human thigh-bone in the stillness of a forest morning had nourished not only her animal body but some darker need of the hungry spirit. (p. 245)

Ellen's anthropophagy prompts her to redefine evil and come to terms with her 'heart of darkness' - a major step in her quest for self-knowledge and a new identity. It is the climax of her confrontation with the hidden depths of her character, and it leads her to a deeper level of self-awareness than that which she has thus far achieved; yet, we must ultimately question the extent of the freedom it brings when she remains a prisoner, an artifact and object of trade to her captors. In such a role, her 'sacrament' is limited and she can only achieve a temporary escape from the 'female passivity' which has immured her from birth (p. 237).

Ellen's relationship with Jack Chance, the convict, is similarly ambiguous. As her rescuer and lover, Jack frees her from the Aborigines and liberates the sensual passion locked deep inside her; however, White's prison imagery leads us to suspect that Ellen is exchanging one kind of captivity for another. Aptly, bird-catching is Jack's profession, and she becomes his latest 'cage-bird', dependent on him for food, safety and human contact. Although she embraces the love and protection he offers, she perceives, through a 'grille' of broken teeth, a man who re-

minds her of penal oppression: 'the settlement at Moreton Bay had begun to exist for her in brick and stone, in dust and glare, in iron and torment, as though she too, had escaped from it only yesterday' (p. 275). Even in their lovemaking, Ellen wonders if they are not 'hardened criminals' desperately attempting to escape from the restrictions of *civilized* society so that they may build an ideal world based on love (p. 276). As reflected by their dreams, this attempt is doomed to fail: Ellen dreams of discovering a redeeming passion in a land of 'thorns, whips, murderers, thieves, shipwreck, and adultresses' (p. 280), only to lose her lover to an Irish female convict, while Jack's nightmare suggests that he cannot forget the past nor prevent himself from wanting to make Ellen a surrogate for his murdered Mab. When the two awake after their disturbing dreams, the light takes on 'iron grey' tones (p. 280), emphasizing the metaphorical prison which encloses them.

The limitations of Jack and Ellen's love are further stressed by ironic images of baptism, suggesting that the measure of new life and happiness they gain from their relationship is brief and tenuous. The most significant of these baptisms follows the night of dreams when the two lovers seek to be cleansed and re-united as they splash about in the lily pond:

> It was sad they should destroy such a sheet of lilies, but so it must be if they were to become re-united, and this after all was the purpose of the lake: that they might grasp or reject each other at last, bumping, laughing, falling and rising, swallowing mouthfuls of the muddy water. ...they kissed, and clung, and released each other, and stumbled out. (p. 285)

In contrast to the well of her youth or the glen in which the cannibal feast took place, this lily pond contains no depths of mystery or blackness. It offers only a shallow font and a baptism which necessarily destroys the natural beauty of the pool and leaves the participants with 'mouthfuls of muddy water'. Although Ellen experiences a momentary union with her 'saviour-lover' during their immersion, her love for Jack gives way to ambivalence, if not open hostility, when she sees the Oakes' farm and realizes that her re-entry into society is only a day away. From this point onward, she begins to resume the role of Mrs Roxburgh, creating an emotional and social distance between herself and the convict. Moreover, she rejects the possibility of symbolic rebirth with Jack when she de-emphasizes the importance of St Hya's Well:

> 'Did I ever tell you, Jack, how I walked all the way to St Hya's and let meself down into the pool? In they days people went to the saint for all kind of sickness. What I went there for I dun't remember not at this distance. Or if I were cured. I dun't believe a person is ever really cured of what they was born with.' (pp. 298-9)

These words contain none of the spiritual awe which Ellen previously associated with the well. They indicate that religious enlightenment seems remote from her present situation, while suggesting that she is prepared to repress the knowledge she gained through past confrontations with evil.

Thereafter, Ellen's gradual movement back into society is punctuated by yet another series of metaphorical baptisms. Given the frame-work of the penal system in which they take place, these baptisms must ultimately be seen as part of an ironic movement back to the restrictions which Ellen sought to escape from; yet they still assert a measure of growth on the part of the protagonist. The first of these ritual initiations occurs when Ellen, who is as 'naked as a new-born' child (p. 297), stumbles out of the wilderness to Oakes' farm where she undergoes a bath, marking her return to civilization. At the hands of Mrs Oakes, she is treated with kindness and nursed back to health even though she experiences recurrent bouts of guilt and self-loathing, locking her up in a dark world from which the journey to Tintagel and ultimate freedom seems impossible. At these times, she again takes on the convict role, an identity which is underlined by Sergeant Oakes's assertion that looking after her is 'worse than mutiny at the prisoners' barracks' (p. 310). Later, Ellen's feelings of imprisonment intensify when she travels southward to stay at Captain Lovell's house in the penal settlement. Here, 'bars of sunlight' and 'gilt grilles' evoke images of a cell (p. 325); yet, even in this stultifying atmosphere, she is baptised twice, suggesting that 'religious' rebirth is still possible although severely limited. In the first instance, she is cleansed by the spittle of a convict when she 'submit[s] herself to humiliation as punishment for her omissions and shortcomings' (p. 335); then, in Pilcher's chapel, Ellen's own tears bathe her in peace as she re-lives the past and accepts her 'chains' as part of the human condition. In doing so, she demonstrates that her quest for self-knowledge has not been futile. Aware of her personal limitations in the face of an existential universe, she is now ready to drop the convict role and venture forward. This step is marked by a final image of ambiguous initiation - the spilt tea which stains Ellen's dress, suggesting that she is entering back into English society with all its positive and negative connotations.

Overall, White's combination of baptism and prison imagery in *A Fringe of Leaves* provides an effective lense through which we may view the protagonist's struggle for freedom and a new identity. Ellen's struggle is not unique; it represents that undertaken by *humankind* in general, particularly those who must forge new and separate nations out of the chaos of penal oppression and colonisation. White exposes the strength of the literal and figurative forces which imprison *us*; yet,

his novel asserts a qualified optimism because it gives *us* glimpses of the symbolic rebirth towards which *we* may aspire even though *we* remain in a continual state of flux, grasping 'at any circumstantial straw which may indicate an ordered universe' (p. 366).

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W.D. ASHCROFT

Intersecting Marginalities: Post-colonialism and Feminism

Although feminist and post-colonial discourses share much in common, the amount of genuine cross-fertilisation between the two is scant. Studies of post-colonial women writers tend to concentrate heavily on the social and political oppression of women, with little attention to the question of woman's language or to the possibilities of a specifically post-colonial feminist theory. On the other hand feminist theorists in general tend to be deeply eurocentric in their assumptions. The very ways in which feminist theory is dichotomised - French and Anglo American - excludes post-colonial feminists, as though they are merely appendages to one or other imperial camp. Post-colonial feminists suffer not just a double colonisation, as Petersen and Rutherford (1985) put it, but a triple. What this distinction of French vs. Anglo American overlooks is precisely what post-colonialism can highlight; that the argument is between the French and English *speaking* feminisms, and the persistence of critics in dichotomising feminism in this way completely overlooks the danger lying in a label which relies directly on the binary structuration of patriarchal discourse.

One function of this paper is to show how a greater cross-fertilisation of ideas and theoretical strategies may be of benefit to both discourses. Both are articulated by resistance to dominant authoritarian and neo-authoritarian orthodoxy and both speak from their position within the hegemonic language to subvert that language. But the most profound similarity is probably the extent to which both 'woman' and 'post-colonial' exist outside representation itself. For Luce Iragaray, woman is 'absence, negativity, the dark continent or at best a lesser man'. In patriarchal, eurocentric, phallogocentric culture the feminine and the post-colonial both exist in this dark chthonic region of otherness and non-being.

AUTHORITARIAN STRATEGIES OF RE-INCORPORATION

Both feminism and post-colonialism suffer the processes of hegemonic re-incorporation by which the imperial/patriarchal centre actually draws subversive elements back into itself. For instance, one of the most insidious denials of the validity of post-colonialism is the suggestion that it demonstrates the outworking of a world-wide spread of **post-modernism**, and thus becomes simply another manifestation of a European cultural movement. The attitude itself is far more widespread than organised written expositions of the idea would suggest. But because it has the status of a prejudice it is much more insidious. The same danger lies in wait for feminism.

Modern feminism leaves itself vulnerable to such charges however, by its often unquestioning adoption of **post-structuralism**. Without commenting at all on the actual premises and strategies of discourse analysis or deconstruction, nor the specific practice of individuals, I would say it is essential for such anti-authoritarian discourses as feminism and post-colonialism to be aware of the ominous intellectual orthodoxy post-structuralism has become in the last fifteen years. So we must look with caution at Jane Gallop's contention that 'the composite word declares the inextricable collusion of phallocentrism and logocentrism ... and unites feminism and deconstructive "grammatological" philosophy in their opposition to a common enemy' (Gallop 1976, p. 30). This may or may not be true but it disregards the extent to which grammatological philosophy itself is positioned within patriarchy and the extent to which its recent dominance reflects the usual tragectory of both patriarchal and eurocentric intellectual hegemony.

A much harder issue to talk about is the incorporation of these discourses into the authoritarian structure of **academic study**. Harder, because this paper could be seen as one example of it. Hélène Cixous, for instance, is pessimistic about the future of the women's movement and of feminist scholarship. Research on women, she argues, has reached a dead-end largely because of the traditional, hierarchical university structures within which it take its place. Thus women's studies, like interdisciplinary studies or Post-colonial literature, is thrown the bone of a separate course and the system can go on unchanged. This affects Post-colonial literature far more because it is further removed from the eurocentric orientation of English departments (into which women's writers courses can be more easily fitted). But generally they are incorporated into an existing structure as a way of keeping them marginalised.

AN 'AUTHENTIC LANGUAGE'

The key to any comparison between feminism and post-colonialism is their concern with language and writing. Although it is through language that the subversion of the imperial/patriarchal can be achieved, both run the risk in their search for an 'authentic language' of an insupportable essentialism.[1] While both share a sense of disarticulation from an inherited language, many post-colonial societies have the apparent advantage of a pre-existing language or a range of named objects and features of place with which language can be changed. Attempts by feminists to recover a primal feminine language, 'a woman's sentence', as Virginia Woolf put it, falls time and again into a peculiar dilemma. For the idea of an essentially distinctive woman's or post-colonial or national sentence founders upon attempts to define its *uniquely* distinguishing characteristics.

In *Man Made Language* the Australian Dale Spender demonstrates the dangers of the so-called Anglo-American position very clearly when she says

> the English language has been literally man made and ... it is still primarily under male control ... This monopoly over language is one of the means by which males have ensured their own primacy, and consequently have ensured the invisibility or 'other' nature of females, and this primacy is perpetuated while women continue to use, unchanged, the language which we have inherited. (Spender 1980, p. 12)

Now this perception seems to concur quite closely with post-colonial views of language history in which the master tongue becomes the prime means of cultural control, supported by overt language policies and a colonial education system. Indeed it seems even more appropriate to those colonial systems where the anglocentric content of education appears to be quite clearly alien to the particular society in which individuals are being educated. But the problem with such a crudely conspiratorial theory of language as 'man-made' or 'metropolitan-made' and a male plot against women or a eurocentric plot against the post-colonial culture, posits an origin to language, a kind of non-linguistic transcendental signifier, or a transcendental conspirator, a concept which cannot be supported. The theory of language which post-colonial experience confirms is the kind of relational view of meaning which Kristeva has developed from such theorists as Volosinov. That is, languages are not conceived as structures or systems, and thus cannot be seen to be either sexist or imperialist *per se* but in the way they are utilised with the socio-historic dynamic of oppression.

Kristeva comes closest to the post-colonial view of language use in the concepts of marginality and subversion. For both discourses, the way out of the essentialist trap in their conceptions of language is in a shift away from the Saussurian concept of *langue* towards a re-establishment of the speaking subject as an object for linguistics. The speaking subject is not a transcendental or Cartesian ego but a positioning of the subject within the activities and changes of discourse, neither as its originator nor its cypher. Language is a process rather than a system - something people do, and although 'language speaks' in the sense that it provides the linguistic options to speakers, it is in the acts of speakers rather than the structure of the system that language has its being.

In rejecting the notion of an essentially sexist or imperialist language the way is open for a coherent theory of *appropriation*. The problem for essentialist feminisms is that by asserting on one hand that the Otherness of woman is a construction of patriarchy and yet that it is out of this otherness that a female language must be constructed or recovered, it falls into the kind of dilemma Shoshana Felman sees Luce Iragaray facing when she presents herself as a woman theorist or a theorist of woman.

> If 'the woman' is precisely the Other of any conceivable Western theoretical locus of speech, how can the woman as such be speaking in this book? Who is speaking here, and who is asserting the otherness of woman? If as Luce Iragaray suggests, the woman's silence or the repression of her capacity to speak, are constitutive of philosophy and of theoretical discourse as such, from what theoretical locus is Luce Iragaray herself speaking in order to develop her own theoretical discourse about women? (Felman 1975, p. 3)

At this point post-colonialism can be of some use. For the woman may not speak so much from the position of her *exclusion* from language as from the position of its inadequacy for her experience.[2] In other words the woman and the post-colonial speak from the *margins* of language. As Wilson Harris has shown, the language can be reformed from the margins by an infinite rehearsal which allows it to erode its own biases, and continually regenerate itself. It is in seizing and refashioning the patriarchal language that the 'silenced' voice can be heard. Thus the Canadian writer Dennis Lee says 'Beneath the words our absentee masters have given us, there is an undermining silence. It saps our nerve. And beneath that silence, there is a raw welter of cadence that tumbles and strains toward words and that makes the silence a blessing because it hushes easy speech. That cadence is home...' (Lee 1974, p. 164). Lee describes his own experience of seeing writers all around him using words while he simply 'gagged'. Writing had become a problem to itself, 'it had grown into a search for authenticity, but all it could

manage to be was a symptom of inauthenticity'. This inauthenticity comes not from the language *per se,* but from the situation of the language in its particular complex of discursive relations. The language becomes a tool for constructing a different reality by initiating different forms of language use. It is invested with strategic markers through the process of naming, and adapted to the linguistic processes of a prior and indigenous, or in the case of settler cultures, a developing and indigenising vernacular language. Thus for both feminism and post-colonialism the 'authentic' language is one whose authenticity itself is constructed in the process of constructing the feminine and post-colonial subject.

WRITING THE BODY / WRITING PLACE

Part of the process of liberating what Lee calls the 'cadence of home' in post-colonial writing is the reconceiving of the lived space within which difference is focussed. This need to write out of a sense of place is equivalent to the exhortations of *écriture feminine* to 'write the body'. Cixous says

> Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies - for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text - as into the world and into history - by her own movement. (Cixous 1975a, p. 245)

Again we have to note that the image here of severance and exclusion, women driven from their bodies, is tempered by the post-colonial view of exclusion through the *inadequacy* of or unrealised possibilities of language. The theory of appropriation shows that the re-entry into the text can be a gradual revolution, but the revolution comes from the surplus, the overflow of linguistic potential. In most respects it would seem that the settler colonies had a greater problem in writing out of their sense of place, because place had to be constructed in that writing. But this is precisely how women must 'write their bodies', by reconstructing, revisioning the body as a site of difference.

In this respect feminism bears the greatest resemblance to post-colonial *settler* cultures, because neither have a past or alternative language with which to assert identity. That alternative 'authentic' language must be created at the site of struggle. White European settlers in the Americas, Australia and New Zealand faced the problem of establishing their 'indigeneity' and distinguishing it from a continuing sense of their European inheritance. In this respect their situation differs

from that of Indians or Africans whose problem was to 'retrieve' their culture and with it write out of some primordial sense of place at the end of a period of foreign rule. Yet even so both had to *create* the indigenous, to discover and re-invent what they perceived to be, in Emerson's phrase, their 'original relation with the universe' (Emerson 1836, p. 21).

This 'original relation' is not a 'return' to European origins. The relation between the people and the land is new, as is that between the imported language and the land, so the 'original' relationship, like the language, must be created anew. In the same way, any native 'mother' tongue is actually patriarchal, so feminists must recreate in language their own original relationship with the excluded and negated subjectivity located in their bodies. The body of woman is not there as some kind of transcendental given. It must be constructed imaginatively just as place is constructed. Thus, although the variety, the exuberance, the plenitude of writing, is held to emerge from the multiplicity, the orgasmic overflowing of female pleasure or *jouissance*, by the same process this 'original relation' is constructed and reconstructed in writing out of a difference and a marginality that is appropriated as a force. There is, says Cixous, 'no general woman, no one typical woman. What they have *in common* I will say. But what strikes me is the infinite richness of their individual constitutions: you can't talk about a female sexuality, uniform, homogeneous, classifiable into codes - any more than you can talk about one unconscious resembling another' (Cixous, 1975a, p. 246). Writing out of this richness, which is at the same time the creation of such richness, the creation of a subversive multiplicity, is held by Cixous to confront the patriarchal binary assumptions which lie within language, a binary opposition in which the feminine is always seen as the negative, powerless instance. Similarly, writing post-colonial 'place' is not writing the lineaments of some geographical given but writing out of a difference which seeks to dismantle the binary structures in which the colonial margin is negated. (In fact, the notion of *placelessness* is a crucial feature of the discourse of place in post-colonial societies.) Like the exponents of *écriture feminine*, Wilson Harris also uses language in a way which specifically and deliberately disturbs attendant assumptions within imperial/patriarchal language, particularly its binary structuration. This pattern of binary structuration in European and many other languages, Harris asserts, lies at the root of the ceaseless pattern of conquest and domination that has formed the fabric of human history (Harris, 1983). Consequently Harris takes direct issue with language in all his works and effects a radical disruption of its binary bases. In works such as *Ascent To Omai* the word, says Gregory Shaw, is

> 'liberated', hollowed out, emptied, through a dialectical process of paired contradictions.... Images crumble, shift, dissolve, and coalesce in strange combinations, or, to use Harris' own term, 'paradoxical juxtapositions', reflecting a universe in the process of becoming. ... Harris' works constitute a programme for the dismantling of myth, a dismantling of history and society, of the object and even the word. (Shaw 1985, p. 125)

It is interesting to speculate how well such a description might apply to the *écriture feminine*. West Indian groups and individuals have always been intensely involved in the 'struggle over the word' in making the only language available 'native' to Caribbean person and place. And it is this struggle over the word, rather than any sense of definition or subjective origin which adumbrates the process of writing from the body and from place. But it is true for all post-colonial writers. As Dennis Lee says, 'The colonial writer does not have words of his own. Is it not possible that he projects his own condition of voicelessness into whatever he creates? That he articulates his own powerlessness, in the face of alien words, by seeking out fresh tales of victims? (Lee 1974, p. 162). 'The language,' he says, 'was drenched with our non belonging ... and words had become the enemy' (Lee 1974, p. 163). For this dilemma Cixous seems to provide the answer: 'A woman's body, with its thousand thresholds of ardour - once, by smashing yokes and censors, she lets it articulate the profusion of meanings that run through it in every direction - will make the old single grooved mother tongue reverberate with more than one language' (Cixous 1975a, p. 256). Nothing could better describe the way english 'the single grooved' patriarchal tongue is made, today, to 'reverberate' with a profusion of possibilities for discourse. With the intervention of the post-colonial *vernacular*, the imperial fiction of standard English has become a profusion of 'englishes'.

Gilbert and Gubar go so far as to say that woman's language is the vernacular. In their essay 'Sexual Linguistics: Gender, Language, Sexuality' (1985) they refute Cixous' contention that the *écriture feminine* has not yet arrived by claiming that the vernacular, the mother tongue, spoken by women and children and suppressed by the formalised father tongue is indeed a woman's language. Although this seems to suggest itself as the basis for a post-colonial feminist linguistics, I think Gilbert and Gubar misunderstand Cixous' view of *écriture feminine* as an array of potentialities for linguistic subversion. It also misses the point that whether the vernacular was there before the patriarchal language or not, it is not recovered in woman's or post-colonial discourse, but *re-invented* just as the 'original relation' with place is re-invented.

MATERNITY / NATIONALITY

One crucial feature of the body which women are exhorted by Cixous to 'write' is that it is also the maternal body. The libido must be expressed in terms of maternity, she contends, since the potential to give birth is the primary indicator of feminine difference. 'Woman,' says Cixous, 'is never far from the mother' (Cixous 1975b, p. 173) she is 'always in a certain way, "mother" to herself and the other' (Cixous 1975b, p. 56).

Although, as Kristeva points out, motherhood can favour feminine creation, it is in the relationship of mothers and daughters that the most radical possibilities of maternity seem located. Adrienne Rich writes in *Of Woman Born*,

> This is the core of my book, and I enter it as a woman who, born between her mother's legs, has time after time and in different ways tried to return to her mother, to repossess her and be repossessed by her, to find the mutual confirmation from and with another woman that daughters and mothers alike hunger for, pull away from, make possible or impossible for each other. (Rich 1976, p. 218)

For many feminists the mother-daughter relationship is crucial in the process of subversion because it is one which implicates the female body and the female subject in primary processes which are held to permeate writing. It is in the pre-patriarchal, pre-oedipal relationship of mothers and daughters that a feminine language might seem to be grounded. And it is from this stage that the semiotic, the pre-verbal conditions of *écriture feminine* arise.

My contention here is that this desire for a return to the original pre-oedipal relationship with the mother replicates the desire within post-colonial discourse to return to an original pre-colonial relationship with the sense of a community *which gave you birth* even though in historical terms this might be an illusion.[3] As with the linking of the body and the maternal body in feminism, the link between place and nation is on some levels inextricable. To link the maternal and the national in this way might appear contentious since the current orthodoxy is that nationalism is the expression of patriarchy *par excellence*. But the development of a nationalism in post-colonial societies is initially focussed on the assertion of difference rather than of domination. In this respect nationalism is a stage which must be passed through in order to most firmly sever those ties with the European presence, which are bound to lock it within the imperial/patriarchal discourse.

An interesting demonstration of the link between mother and nation is Mary Gilmore's poem, 'Nationality':

I have grown past hate and bitterness,
I see the world as one;
But though I can no longer hate,
My son is still my son.

All men at God's round table sit,
And all men must be fed;
But this loaf in my hand,
This loaf is my son's bread

(Gilmore 1948, p. 287)

The first thing that strikes me about this is the very clear depiction of nationalism in terms of motherhood. But its second feature is the way Gilmore is speaking quite clearly from patriarchal discourse which privileges and mystifies the mother-son relationship to the exclusion of all others. Nevertheless I would contend that even in Gilmore's poetry which is struggling hard with patriarchal discourse, although still locked within it, the linking of the maternal and the national stems directly from the need to subvert the Law of the Father[4] which is also the Law of Empire. No matter what historical forces might have brought it into being the imaginative invention of nationality is an attempt to construct the primordial under the guise of recovering it.

BISEXUALITY / CULTURAL SYNCRETICITY

The attraction to an authentic language means that both feminism and post-colonialism wrestle with the constant danger of essentialism: on the one hand the fallacy of the transcendental feminine subject acting as the focus of feminine discourse, on the other, the belief in an essential cultural purity which can be recovered as the focus of national and cultural identity. The movement to combat these tendencies within feminism and post-colonialism themselves therefore leads to a subversion of some of the most fundamental binary structures, on the one hand a subversion of the separation between male and female, on the other a rejection of a distinction between a 'pure' and 'impure' cultural identity.

In post-colonial theory the most advanced exponents of cultural syncretism are writers from the Caribbean whose societies have developed from the most complex range of influences. For Edward Kamau Brathwaite, it is through a process of *creolisation*, of hybridisation that 'we become ourselves, truly our own creators, discovering word for object, image for the word' (Brathwaite 1974, p. 42). Denis Williams, in his essays and art, proposes the 'catalysis' model of Guyanese society in which a catalytic interaction occurs in which 'each racial group qualifies,

and diminishes, the self-image of the other' (Williams 1969, p. 19). Jacques Stephen Alexis opposes the idea of a monolithic solidarity of an African diaspora captured in the term 'Black Writing'. In an essay called 'Of the Marvellous Realism of the Haitians', he reveals the synthesis of European, African and Amerindian which forms the genesis of Haitian art and reveals the 'contradictory character of human consciousness' (Alexis 1956, p. 267).

But the theorist of syncretism par excellence is Wilson Harris. Harris has a profound belief in the possibilities of (individual and communal) psychic regeneration through catastrophe. Even race hatred and race oppression by their own energies savagely deconstruct themselves, seeking to 'erode their own biases' (Harris 1985, p. 127), and to dismantle their binary oppositional bases. In the time scale of 'the womb of space' the original human ancestors are ancestors of all. The annihilation of the Caribs and the atrocities of slavery energise one field of historical activity which eventually results in the contemporary Caribbean mixing of all peoples, returning them to an original 'shared' ancestry. To effect this return language must be altered, its power to fix beliefs and attitudes must be exposed, and words and concepts 'freed' to associate in new ways. As Harris's work points out most clearly, syncreticity is not a view of culture limited to the Caribbean but one which reviews our notions of cultural identity itself. Such a review pushes cultural identity beyond the limited and localising nationalism which marks an early stage of post-colonial political development, and introduces a view of the hybridity and complexity of all cultures.

Similarly the issue of sexual syncretism reflects some of the most radical explorations of recent feminism. This same syncretic impulse prompted Kristeva at one stage to reject feminism as a fundamentally unanalyzed view, caught in the concept of a separate identity and unaware of the nature of its relation to political power. She proposed an altemative to feminism which would acknowledge our theoretical bisexuality, the self's 'capacity to explore the entire range of meanings possible, including those which create meaning and those which multiply it, pulverize it and make it new' (Kristeva 1974, p. 99).

As Cixous also points out, the very bifurcation of male and female imprisons us within the binary structures of patriarchy. In 'The Laugh of the Medusa' (1975a) she speaks of something she calls the 'other bisexuality' which is really a multi- or a-sexuality strongly reminiscent of the ontological hybridisation developed in Caribbean theory. Cixous wants the essential bisexuality of the unconscious to be uncovered; 'the ensemble of one and the other, not fixed in sequence of struggle and expulsion or some other form of death but infinitely dynamized by an incessant process of exchange from one subject to another' (1975a,

p. 246). This 'incessant process of exchange' is the same process Harris engages in when he speaks from the position of historical marginality to reveal the illusion or at least the corrigibility of structure.

The most interesting possibilities for post-colonial theory come from feminist syntheses of the bisexual and maternal. Lacanian psychoanalysis provides a basis for feminists to posit that woman's being is a continuous plural process because of the pre-oedipal mother-daughter relationship which is subsequently suppressed. For Kristeva the maternal, paired with the paternal, represents a theoretical bisexuality, 'not androgyny but a metaphor designating the possibility of exploring all aspects of signification' (cited in Burke 1987, p. 112). The similarity here to Caribbean ideas of creolisation, and synthesis of old and new world (the maternal and paternal) becomes obvious. The bisexuality of the unconscious is not simply a union of the maternal and paternal but in post-colonial terms an openness to the continuing deferral of cultural identity. Within this kind of schema the notion of the 'national', despite the energies it displays for the assertion of difference and distinction, can be recognised as a fundamentally arbitrary designation which prepares the way for plurality and multiplicity. That it doesn't always, or even often do this, but solidifies into chauvinism and jingoism shows the power of the imperial/patriarchal working within all cultures, and the centrifical forces which work to create new 'centres' of aesthetic, cultural or political domination.[5]

Whereas the bisexuality of the unconscious is analogous to post-colonial syncretism, the post-colonial perspective may also help to dismantle some of the unexamined assumptions which lie behind some terms of importance to feminism, such as the term 'the unconscious' itself. For the unconscious is not a subterranean locus, a kind of subliminal psychic bank which colonises all conscious experience in one way or another, but is an open field of possibility. The unconscious is that which lies beyond the margins, that which lies on the horizon of thought before thinking has brought it into being. The primordial content of being and identity can only be 'recovered' by being 'discovered' beyond the edges. And both the edges and the discoveries represent the most exciting aspects of these two discourses.

Ultimately, this paper can only point the way to those edges. Both feminism and post-colonialism are flawed by an insufficient awareness of each other and a shared propensity to solidify into a new orthodoxy. But a greater awareness of each other's strategies may lead to fusion of energies. Perhaps through the gaps and absences of this paper might emerge what has not yet been - a genuine post-colonial feminism.

NOTES

1. The term 'essentialism' as it is used in this paper refers to the assumption that groups or categories or classes have one or several identifying characteristics, shared by all members of that category and excluded from all non-members. Thus a feminine language must have characteristics not shared by males and demonstrated by all feminine users of the language for it to be regarded as an essentially female discourse.
2. Or, more precisely, the feeling that the potential for encoding feminine experience in language has not been harnessed. Language does not reflect experience in any simple ostensive way, but contributes to its formation.
3. Following this metaphor we might have to concede that post-colonial countries vary in this process. Countries such as India and Africa show a clear impulse to revert to a 'maternal' relationship with a coherent politico/cultural entity such as a nation. The settler cultures are the 'orphans' of place, and because they never had a 'maternal' relationship, the constructed relationship with the idea of a separate nation relies heavily on notions of place to compensate for confused and ambivalent notions of political identity.
4. The 'Law of the Father' refers to that moment in the child's development when she discovers that the father possesses the phallus and represents power in the world. At this point the oedipal phase fixes patriarchal language in the child's consciousness as the dominant form of discourse.
5. I would contend that chauvinism and jingoism as aggressive assertions of centrality are not fundamentally nationalist but imperialist, analogously stemming from a kind of Law of the Father which identifies the phallocentric focus of power in culture and history.

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Jan Owen

FORNACE VIVARINI
Murano, Venice

To slay the dragon and become a saint
Donato simply spat
The bare bones of the story lie
in a squat twelfth century church
bleached ribs of a whale
One right turn to the squamous green
of the Angels' Canal
and the steady roar of a glowing cave
where Gino and Dario harpoon heat
with a gob of phlegm
breathe baubles clear as spittle
or twirl blue dolphins airily out of flame
The fiery maw of the furnace smiles
the legend draws you in
At sunset the whole lagoon
remembers dragons
a lazy ripple of red-gold scales

HEARTSEASE

I was blue
and the flowers were black
irresistible
But the plant looked sick
Uneasily I brought it home
(seven crows flapped overhead)
and set it in a white glazed pot
to counterbalance fate
It flourished

From a northerly ledge
the little Africa faces
hungry for light
track east to west across the day
like one slow transit of a cage
They have swallowed the sun
to work this alchemy at the heart
whose flash of gold outstrips
distance and dark
(a panther's eye?
the edge of the eclipse?)
easy as that

Riemke Ensing

INNER GARDENS
(to Zhang Weiping in prison)

Nine years is a long time
to keep darkness company
but remember the story of Lan
Xiang Cheng. A wise man. He fell
in love with landscapes and seasons. Spring
was his favourite. All that blossom
and promise. It lasts
only a short while. The wind comes
and the rain and it's gone. He wanted
to hold on to Spring. Keep it about
himself a little longer. So he built a study
in his garden in the mountain and called it
'study containing spring'. That way he kept life
with him for a very long time.

TAI CHI QUAN

If the space where they keep you
the next years is just a little
larger than the length of your outstretched
arms, you will be able to visualize clouds
and move them away
with a slow graceful turn
of your hand should they frown
or darken to form rain. A few movements
will shape you trees to shade your head
and the hard board of your bed
will be earth soft in late spring sprung
bright with flowers and new grass. You
might be tempted to tense a melon
out of the early vapours of air and imagine
oh, imagine that cool caress for breakfast.
These small acts will make you
stronger than *Lapsang Souchong* tea,
subtle as ink bamboo
handscrolled on paper
all those centuries ago. (Li K'an)
Remember the story
told of the woman in prison
She knew Beethoven well. From inside
each day she conducted a quartet. Each part
separately in her head then putting all four
instruments together silently as she sat there
in solitary confinement. It took years
but the music lifted the sky
into that darkness and the sun,
gave back her life.

The Great South Land

Reality is that which is.

The English word 'real' stems from a word which meant *regal,* of or pertaining to the king.

'Real' in Spanish means *royal.*

Real property is that which is proper to the king.

Real estate is the estate of the king.

Reality is that which pertains to the one in power, is that over which he has power, is his domain, his estate, is proper to him.

The ideal king rules over everything as far as the eye can see. His eye. What he cannot see is not royal, not real.

He sees what is proper to him.

To be real is to be visible to the king.

The king is in his counting house.

Marilyn Frye, *The Politics of Reality* (1983)

The Pinnacles at Nambung National Park, Western Australia comprises a large landscape of extraordinary rock forms. They were first sighted by early Dutch navigators who thought they were the ruins of an ancient city.

The Australian Adventure (1988)

The listener speaks:
A traveller stayed here at the Herberge last night. I sat and listened as he told stories to my father and anyone else who would listen. He drank ale and as the night drew on the stories became more and more fantastic.

He had been to places that I had never imagined, even in my dreams. But he said that they are real, that they do exist. He told tales of forests dripping with mist, of flowers bigger than a man's head, of buildings so massive that it takes a day to walk around the perimeter. He said that instead of narrow cobbled streets there are footways encrusted with sparkling jewels - ruby, sapphire, emerald. But even more fantastic were his tales of the Great South Land - they now call it New Holland - which, he said, is no other than the fabled land of Atlantis. And, he said that he saw the ruins of the Atlantean civilization with his very own own eyes.

The observer speaks:
'It was a bright day with the sun sparkling on the water and the sky overhead like the blue domes of the infidel. We had been following the coast for a week or more and though we had taken shelter in a cove here and there along the coast we had seen nothing to indicate a kingdom or a civilization of any kind. Then as we sailed along a stretch of coast in the vicinity of latitude thirty, the fellow in the forecastle cried, "City ahoy".'

'We, none of us, believed him. But we pulled in nearer to the land and dropped anchor (we had our guns manned in case of aggression). We moored in a shallow bay a few hundred strokes from the shore, remaining overnight, half expecting the people of the city to come out in boats and welcome us.'

The unseeable speaks:
The ghosts come from the west following the track of the wind from Bralgu. They wait. They sit and dream and wait for the sun and the moon to set. Then they are coming to us over the water from the west. These ghosts from the Land of the Dead must be very old. They are unlike the other visitors who come from the dreaming places beyond the sea. Their extremities are pale, like the feathers of old cockatoo. Elsewhere they are adorned with coloured feather-skin. They are stiff-legged and they leave the strangest of tracks. Their feet have no partings. They move in strange ways, standing stiff-legged or lying on their backs.

They come out of the west and make fast fire magic. They touch our earth and walk around our country ignoring our ways, crossing tracks, scattering their tracks in ways we have not seen - even the eldest of our people knows no stories of ghosts such as these. They do not carry out the usual practices. They do not follow our maps. They carry off parts of our mother. They take hot stones with them, they break and damage the places left to us by other dreaming spirits.

With neither spear nor boomerang, animals fall down dead. Angry spirit shouts go up and the animals die.

They do not seem to hear us. We squat nearby, just beyond their range - all day. We sing dreaming songs, but they do not seem to hear us. Except one, who came near, who spoke gibberish and who fled when we approached him.

The moon dances, waiting. They walk to the west from their camp. They climb into their boats and follow the clouds to the west. The earth is quiet again.

The observer speaks:

At sunrise I went up on deck, and there before my eyes were the golden pillars. Thousands of golden pillars. The captain was there too, with his glass. He passed it to me, I could hardly believe my eyes. As each man looked he gasped at what lay before him. Line after line of golden pillars.

We discussed how we should protect ourselves as we went ashore, since any king with such wealth would surely wish to protect it.

We agreed after some time that we would go ashore in groups of three. The first three were excited at being chosen to be the leaders, but there was fear in their eyes as they left. We watched as they stepped from the boat and approached the gleaming pillars. All was quiet. I went in the second group of three. We landed unharmed and tried to catch up with those ahead of us. Others followed.

We walked forward into what might have been a forest of stone pillars (alas, they were not solid gold after all). The area of the ancient city - for it could be none other than that - was huge. A winding track wove between the ancient foundations of the city.

That night we discussed how it might have been that the city was destroyed, what had happened and how long ago the disaster had occurred - for why else would anyone desert this wondrous place with its vista of green India sea? The place was utterly deserted and appeared to have been for eons. As we talked, our imaginations wandered through the possibilities. We agreed that some giant wave must have destroyed everything and everyone. Perhaps the city was once even bigger than the remains we saw.

The next day we set out, again in groups of three, to draw a map of the ancient city. It was so vast and complex of design that by the end of the day we had covered a mere fraction of it. Our captain was intent on doing this, so that we could return to Holland with a map of our findings. He assured us that the king would send us back better prepared for further explorations.

But to return to the ruined city. Such a city it must have been. Such an extraordinary civilization. The design was beyond anything I had ever seen before. Our mathematician, admittedly more accustomed to mapping latitude and longitude, turned himself to the task of deciphering the pattern of the city. He said that if it resembled anything, it resembled the pattern of the stars in the sky.

We found no sign of habitation, no sign of living beings, no king. Only our shipboard fool reported he'd seen naked men and women bedaubed with paint and feathers, but when we went to investigate, there was no one and no trace of anyone. I think he must have seen ghosts or his imaginings had run riot. He said too, that he had heard singing and the sound such as might be made by a giant buzzing bee, but none of us heard a thing. He had his moment of glory in entertaining us with a ridiculous story about a hopping mouse as big as a man!

After making the maps and after searching and exploring in the area we returned to the ship and set sail. It is a land of eternal sun and one day I would like to go back and see if there might be a people such as we found in other places. But none of them could have built such a city. They were unenlightened and dispirited savages.

The city we saw could only have been built by a civilization so old and so sophisticated such as the one Plato writes of. His Atlantis was a city of light (just as this one was) and built on geometric principles (such as those reflected in the stars). This, I am certain, is, or rather was, the city of Atlantis. It is the land we have dreamed of, the land we have all known about in our minds for millennia. But we are too late, too late to speak with those enlightened inhabitants of the past.

I am sure that at one time it was encrusted with gold, but only the pillars have withstood the winds of time. They remain, the skeleton of humanity's pinnacle of achievement.

The King speaks:
This fabulous story you tell me Sir, what is your proof? This map is mere marks on paper. Any fool could concoct that. And judging by your shipboard fool, and the outrageous stories he has told to my fool, I would suggest that this tale you tell is entirely fabricated. No one else tells such stories - giant hopping mice and swans that are black! What do you take me for? A fool? And how would this Plato know? He's dead. A lot of use. Maps, marks on paper, stories told by fools. They are nothing. I want to see some real evidence of this place. Where are the jewels, the gold, the real things of conquest. A city's not much good if it doesn't have any inhabitants. Ha ha. I tell you what. You go and talk to my cartographer. Tell him your story and show him your map.

Tell him to put the city on the map and call the place New Holland. At least if it's worth anything we'll own it. But I'm not wasting my gold in sending you back there.

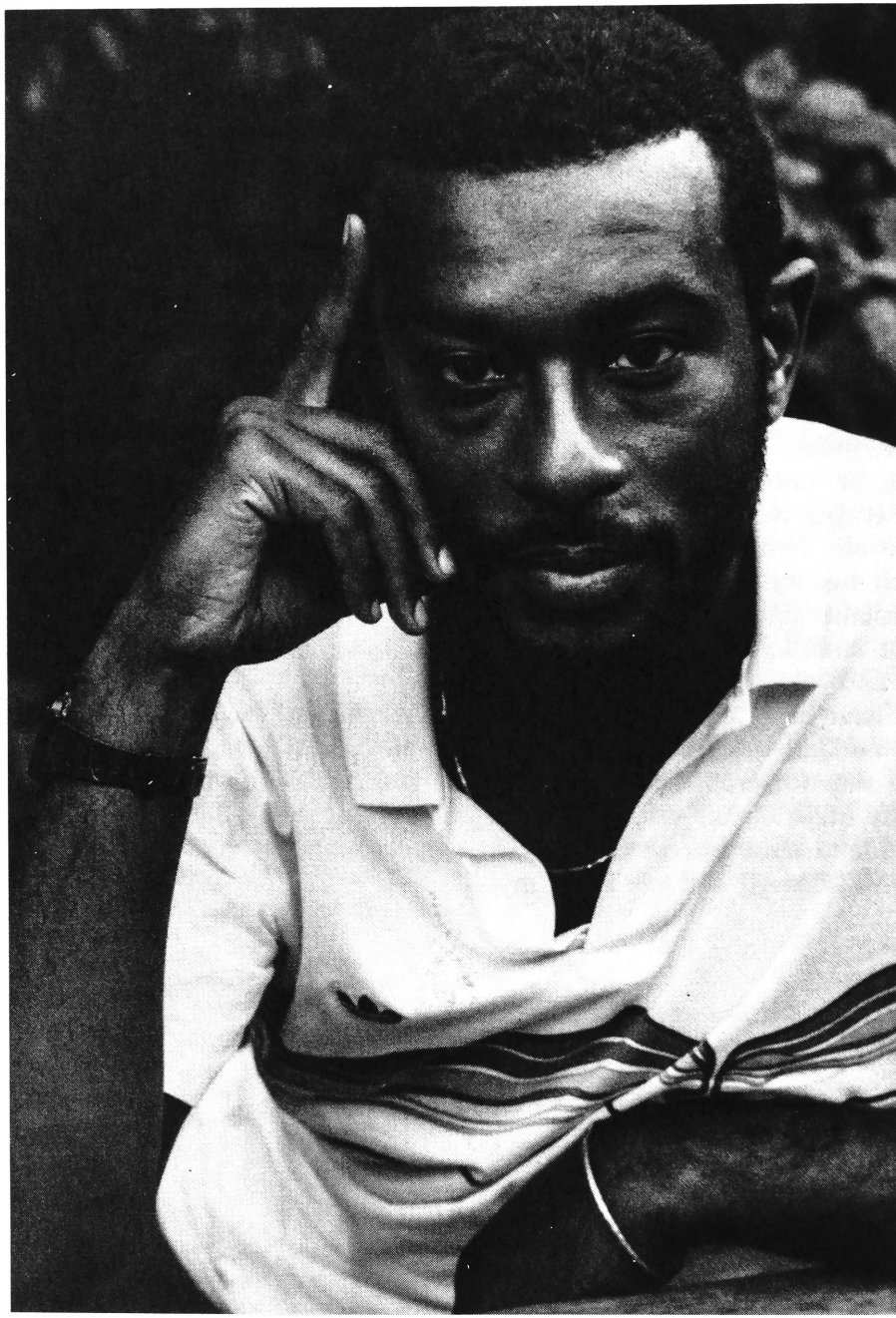
The listener speaks:
New Holland. How lovely. How fresh, not like this Old Holland. That place where the sun shines on vast plains and gold shimmers before your eyes. The Great South Land, yes, surely it must be. Or else the world would topple over, top heavy. And with so many people here, there must be just the same number there - somewhere. God likes symmetry and beauty and geometry.

Oh, to sail out beyond these narrow canals, these constricting streets, these eternally grey skies into the world of sun and sea (even a raging sea) and space. I would go there on this thin thread of hope to start life anew, to start a life that I do not know in advance. What strange adventures would befall me, Hilde? What wondrous sights would I see? Oh, for motion and for light, I would do anything. Anything.

Perhaps there are kings there still, and queens and princesses, girls like me. How I would like to talk with them, to have them tell me their history; to tell them about this world. About the rain that is so constant, about the small cozy rooms and the talk over ale and how I first came to hear of their civilization. A traveller, I would say, passed by and told of you.

I have been looking at the cartographer's newest map. He has drawn in the land described by the traveller. He has drawn Zephyr blowing the ship towards the west coast of a vast and amorphous land. And there, right on the coast, is the single city. The city is labelled Atlantis. The land mass has written, in ornate calligraphy, 'New Holland'.

I want to go and see it for myself.



Caryl Phillips. Photo: Tara Heinemann.

Living and Writing in the Caribbean: An Experiment

While recovering from the shock of having met somebody who has the audacity to describe themselves as a writer, the innocent, in my experience, generally scratches about for a while trying to think of something interesting to say about the curious profession of the person before them. 'Well, it must be quite insecure,' venture some; others might ask, 'Do you do anything else but write?' The more daring come straight to the point. 'I'd write if I had more spare time.' Occasionally somebody will say, 'It must be nice being able to live and work where you like.' This last statement is the one I wish to say a few words about, namely the rather romantic notion that writers can live and work anywhere, and, if you'll excuse the indulgence, I'll make the odd reference to my own situation as a writer born on the small island of St Kitts in the Eastern Caribbean, who came to England as a small child, grew up in England, but who has spent much of the last decade shuttling back and forth between the two places.

If the voice that began, 'It must be nice being able to live and work where you like' decides to press on, it often continues in this fashion. 'You're so lucky being able to move around the world. Look at Joyce in Switzerland, Lawrence in Mexico, Baldwin in France, Ibsen in Italy...' and so on, and so on... What our speaker pictures is a nice villa, a plentiful supply of wine, the writer outside in a straw hat, sleeves rolled up, sunning himself, polishing off a couple of thousand words a day, then taking a siesta. If only it were like this. Joyce, Lawrence, Baldwin and Ibsen all fled societies that were stifling their talent. They were compelled to leave if they wished to develop - they were no longer feeding off their societies, the society was feeding off them. Some writers cannot leave - I think of Pasternak. Others refuse to leave and their talent is gobbled up - I think of Mailer or Capote. Others are expelled by their societies and their talent stumbles - I think of Solzhenitsyn. The relationship between where a writer lives and how he is able to develop his talent is a very delicate one, and it is a relationship which may cause the writer a great deal of soul-searching and heart-

ache. If writers could just live and work anywhere then I suspect the Bloomsbury group and the Left-Bank group, and all other such metropolitan literary clubs and movements, may never have existed. History would record the Tahiti movement, who were opposed by those of the Honolulu tendency, and revolutionary theories of the newly-emerged Majorca school of thought. I would, in the course of this brief address, like to suggest that writers are not free to live and work where they wish, and that when a writer does choose to settle in a new locale it is very seldom a decision arrived at through romance. Writing is a very practical and tactile profession - one feels one's way along tentatively, clutching here, groping at that, clinging to the other. Knowledge of one's own stage of development, coupled with a desire to wrestle with a given society or societies (at either long-distance or close-in) will determine the piece of earth that a writer chooses to settle on in order to continue to wage the battle known as creativity.

Let me look for one second at the case of the Caribbean and Caribbean writers. The movement of native-born writers, generally in the direction of the United States, Canada or Britain, enabled many Caribbean writers to not only find their voices, but afforded them the opportunity to earn a living from their work. This exportation of Caribbean writing talent to the large cities of North America and Europe is by no means a recent phenomenon. The blossoming of talent in the fifties which produced such writers as Wilson Harris, Sam Selvon, Jan Carew, V.S. Naipaul and Derek Walcott, saw them all become exiles and certainly, in the case of at least one of the afore-mentioned writers, they are now sometimes viewed as little more than exotic adjuncts to the larger literary tradition of their adopted countries. For those who remained behind, or left and returned, such as Lamming or Brathwaite or Morris, the literary communities they operate in are smaller than they might be, indeed smaller than they ought to be. Naipaul has suggested that Caribbean writers in the Caribbean stop writing because 'they come to some understanding of the destitution of Caribbean society' and they cannot face it and go on. However, I wonder about the 'destitution' of those Caribbean writers who live abroad, and continue to draw upon the Caribbean as a central theme, for as an Indian professor of English Literature once said to me, 'Nostalgia can only sustain a writer for so long.' I would like to partner this statement with an old Yoruba saying: 'The river that does not know its own source dries up.' You see, writers do need a people to feed off, they do need to grow and develop by nibbling at the table of a particular society, and it is possible that this continued exportation of Caribbean writing talent, an exportation which goes on until the present day, has in some

ways prevented the region from fully realizing the promise of the fifties.

In Britain, Caribbean writers of my generation, David Dabydeen, Linton Kwesi Johnson, Joan Riley, Fred D'Aguiar, and others, all have different degrees of attachment to the Caribbean. All of our branches have developed, and to some extent continue to develop and grow, in Britain, but our roots are in Caribbean soil. As I said, I think we all have different degrees of attachment to the Caribbean depending upon how old we were when we came to Britain, how often we get back, what family we have there, what family we have in Britain, and so on. Personally speaking, I have now had ten years of 'going back' and forth to the Caribbean, although it would be disingenuous of me to not mention that I have worked more consistently and, in some cases, more comfortably in Britain. However, in the last couple of years I have noticed things about British literary and non-literary society that have started to worry and irritate me.

My main observation concerns the lack of time that is afforded a writer in Britain, irrespective of background, subject-matter, or country of origin, to develop. As British publishing has become increasingly dominated by New York, it seems that New York-style pressures have descended onto the shoulders of British-based authors. The English writer Cyril Connolly had a recipe for how an author should deal with such pressures. The author should, he claims, 'refuse all publicity which does not arise from the quality of his work, [to] beware of giving his name to causes, [to] ration his public appearances, [to] consider his standards and the curve of development which he feels latent within him, yet not [to] indulge in gestures which are hostile to success when it comes...' Well, this is easier said than done, and especially in a country where writers are generally quickly embalmed and exhibited as cultural functionaries or celebrities on show. For the writer, particularly the young writer, a willingness to acquiesce to such treatment can stifle a nascent talent.

There is, of course, an additional pressure in Britain if one happens to be black. The missionary approach - the idea that the black writer should explain black people to white people - dominates the thinking of some publishers and many critics. Both this pressure, and that of unwelcome and over-attentive publicity, are antithetical to any real development in a career that has the rare benefit of longevity. As Thomas Hardy said, 'the important thing is not the vulgar applause at the outset - that comes to all - but the general feeling at the exit.' My growing feeling that I needed a long sabattical from Mrs Thatcher's Britain, and my desire to try and spend more time in the Caribbean as a resident and not a visitor, led me to last year pack my bags, rent my

house in London, and get on a plane for St Kitts. I should explain that St Kitts, being a small island in the Eastern Caribbean of 68 square miles and having a population of 35,000, is hardly typical of the region as a whole. Trinidad, Jamaica, and Barbados all boast University campuses and the attendant benefits of bookshops and a more vigorous cultural and social dynamic. St Kitts is, however, typical of the smaller islands of the Caribbean, the newly independent Third Worlds within the Third World.

And so I left and arrived with my typewriter and practically everything else that I owned. As always the first few days back in the Caribbean were a pleasure. I felt warm, I could see the horizon, I swam in the sea, lay on the beach, chatted with old friends, drove up into the hills, and then up to the far end of the island to the village where I was born. But I also had to remind myself that I had work to do. St Kitts was no longer a holiday retreat, it was home now. I tried to impose some routine on the day. My family stopped seeing so much of me, and eventually my Great-grandmother asked what I was doing with my time. 'Writing,' I said. She sneered. 'That's not real work.' She glanced purposefully in the direction of a canefield. I got the message. My uncle leaned against the counter of his shop. I reminded him yet again that I write for a living. 'So you're like me then,' he said. 'You don't do anything and you don't start until noon.'

The lack of understanding of the role of a writer was in many ways liberating, but after a month or two things became rather wearing. It seemed to me that the only members of society who were afforded any status were cricketers and calypso singers. I did not resent this, for I love both calypso and cricket, but what I found myself yearning for was some kind of affirmation of my values. In short, I began to resent the lack of interest placed on the arts. Poetry, theatre, music, literature, painting, these activities were not encouraged or cherished, except by the odd eccentric individual. Certainly a Government which seven years ago saw the local library burn down, and has still done nothing about building a new one, cannot claim to have any interest in literacy, let alone the arts. It is true that education and health should be the priorities for any newly-emerging nation, but I believe that just as one deserves good roads and hospitals in exchange for taxes, one also has the right to expect facilities which feed the soul - in other words, a theatre, a decent newspaper, a decent bookshop, and yes, god forbid, a library. On St Kitts the sole Government concession to the arts is the cable television network with fourteen channels of American programming twenty-four hours a day.

Clearly much of my life, living and writing in the Caribbean, centres around a frustrating desire for values in the society to change. Essen-

tially I'm involved in a political struggle for I feel that a shift in the balance of power might facilitate change in the direction I would like. However, this political struggle frustrates me almost as much as the struggle of living and writing in Britain. Of late I have begun to wonder about the situation of the Barbados writer, George Lamming, who seems to have turned so much of his energy from writing towards political activity. I suspect this is as a result of having once more made his home in the often stifling socio-cultural climate of the modern-day Caribbean. It seems clear to me that because of my time in Britain I laboured under the illusion that indifference towards the writer was a blessing, a freedom that would enable the writer to get on with his work. I now know better, that indifference is as large a curse as over-attention and that writers cannot survive in societies that deem them worthless, they tire of the effort, they fall silent, they make a premature peace with mediocrity, they stop writing and the shroud of loneliness descends.

So what to do now? I feel as though I have exchanged membership of an exclusive and self-aggrandizing literary club for the attempted membership of a club that does not really exist, for Caribbean writers do not meet regularly on a regional basis, read each others' work and reviews, talk, or help each other. The geographical limitations are obvious, yet at the same time I know that the Polish poet Milosz is correct when he writes, 'no one inflates himself or runs away from his centre, his inner point of support, without paying for it.' I ask myself where is this inner point of support, for I have no desire to run off and discover a place or country with a peacefully uncomplicated, preferably exotic, backdrop. As I suggested at the onset of this talk, writers are not free to do such things for they are held or repelled by specific societies. The longer I thought the clearer it became that the inner point of support that Milosz writes of lies, for me, in both Britain and the Caribbean. Out of the tension between these two places is spun this thing called literature. And although the price to be paid for continuing to have an attachment to both places is high in terms of emotional, financial, and material cost and the resultant sense of almost permanent displacement, this price is not as high as that which would be demanded from me were I to beat a romantic retreat to the unmarked, unnamed, much-imagined villa in the sun where inevitably, like the river that does not know its own source, the writer's pen begins to dry up. In a sense my experiment, my living and writing in the Caribbean, as well as in Britain, is like being in love. You don't love somebody for what they are, you learn, after a while, to love them in spite of what they are. Failure to do so leads to nutritional deficiency.

I just want to say a final quick word about a great man of the Caribbean, possibly the finest critical intelligence the region has produced. Two weeks ago C.L.R. James died at the venerable age of eighty-eight. On glancing back through some of his writings I came across the following quote which seems a very apposite one with which to close my talk. 'It is when you are outside, but can take part as a member, that you see differently from the ways they see, and you are able to write independently.' If the new Caribbean writers, whether resident in Canada, Britain or the United States, can find the strength to hang on to both here and there, to, in C.L.R. James's words, 'take part as a member' even though they may occasionally feel 'outside', then the future of Caribbean writing will be healthy and one day soon I may feel that I do not wish to add the appendage, 'An Experiment' to my title - one day soon I may feel that the appendage should consist of the bolder and more positive words, 'Living and Writing in the Caribbean: THE REALITY'.

CRAIG TAPPING

Children and History in the Caribbean Novel: George Lamming's *In the Castle of my Skin* and Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John*

In my own research and teaching of Commonwealth literature, I am ever more conscious of a dilemma confronting those who would wrestle with contemporary theory and yet remain committed to the cultural practices and literatures being produced on the decentered margins of former Empire.[1] Contemporary theory, first generated from within academics of the 'developed' world, is then exported for use in explaining, debasing, and re-inscribing subordinate positions for the subjects and creators of literature from the so-called 'underdeveloped' world.[2] Theorists either reinscribe the canonicity of the very texts they claim to 'decenter', or use Euro-American ideologies of language and textuality to re-colonize writing from newly independent, formerly silences regions of the world.[3] Once again, the 'underdeveloped' world provides the raw materials for the careers and profits of more technologically advanced master-consumers who import the raw material (literature) and convert it to their own ends (theory).[4] This unfortunate condition underwrites whatever it is I do - for example, in an essay such as this - with novels from the Caribbean.

In my work, I am compelled to find readings which acknowledge that novels such as George Lamming's *In the Castle of my Skin*[5] and Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John*[6] reveal how language and its literary forms mediate a very real world in which peoples' lives depend on how we read and what we do with that reading. Despite contemporary theory's refutation of absolutist and logocentric categories, the new literatures in English - of which these two novels about childhood and education are particularly significant examples - are generated from within cultures and social groups for whom such terms as 'authority' and 'truth' are empirically urgent in their demands.

Too often, theories of postmodern fiction elide the historical and political contexts inscribed by the post-colonial, treating variant language

patterns, rhetorical structures, and fictional themes as reflections of universally shared epistemes. Differences of race, class and sexuality are thereby erased or defused, and the Western academic once again controls the production of meaning through sophisticated descriptions of various processes of representation.[7]

Therefore, I begin with a premise derived from dialogue with other critics in the same dilemma. Practice, the self-representations of formerly silenced, marginalized or negated subjects, is always already a theory of the other. Lamming explicitly signals this truth in his essays and in the Introduction to the American edition of his novel. Explaining how he writes, Lamming describes his fictions as the effort 'to change this way of seeing',[8] to offer an 'alternative direction'[9] through which readers and community may come to understand history anew.

But novels such as George Lamming's *In the Castle of my Skin* and Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John* are also more than this: each novel demonstrates clearly what we in our northern academies often forget or deny - that theory proceeds from practice, and not the reverse. To remember this is to begin re-reading novels like these two much more closely than we have previously done. It is an end to 'reading as tourism'.[10]

Both novels offer strikingly similar, and tellingly distinct, versions of one salient fact: the subject of Commonwealth literature is always historically situated. In George Lamming's *In the Castle of my Skin* and Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John*, the Caribbean child is subjected to the lessons of history - how empire, caste, and race have conspired to reduce or negate his or her existence. As each child recognizes the lessons within the classroom, so each child also learns how to appropriate, alter and subvert the very history which would deny him or her personal identity and power. For that is the lesson of both fictions: history cannot be merely modified if the subject community or race are to determine their own futures, but must be confronted, written against, and written over.[11] This second lesson - how to survive strategically - is taught outside the classroom and is embodied in the forms which each novelist uses.

The structure of both novels is a lesson in how to engage with history. And each novel prefigures that engagement through a Biblical metaphor derived from childhod experience. For Lamming's G., the novel begins with Noah's Flood and is predicated on the construction of a new world, under a new dispensation. This explains the optimism of the enterprise and the communal vision of *In the Castle of my Skin*. Kincaid's eponymous heroine, in contrast, describes the Paradise she has lost (p. 25), prefiguring the shame, isolation and abandonment which the novel pursues. This figure may also explain the novel's curious

pretense of intimacy while it withholds information central to our understanding of its plot.[12]

Each novel confronts a system of representation which denies its protagonist his or her primacy, in order to construct a new model of reality. About halfway through Lamming's novel, for example, a group of villagers has gathered to discuss Empire, Marcus Garvey and the disjunctions between the history they've lived and the history they've been taught. This community wants another version of the past, which would offer them another, more empowering explanation for the present and another, more inspiring agenda for the future. Lamming articulates what contemporary theorists might call the epistemological dilemma of post-colonial fiction through the rustic figure and untutored dialect of the shoemaker who recognizes this problematic desire for another legitimate history: '"That's what I mean," said the shoemaker; "you say it ain't true too, and' that's what they say only in a different way"' (p. 104) What is further clear in both novels is that - despite the avowed beliefs and fervent hopes of administrators, parents and teachers - it is not art, literature or history which is taught in the schoolrooms, but submission and acquiescence. And both novelists analyze the lineaments of that submission and dominance using a system of literary-historical icons and measuring responses to those images. This figural system is remarkably consistent from one fiction to the other, and tellingly different.

This may well sound ingenuous: after all, the Empire does not disappear overnight, even after independence has been granted. And, regardless of what provincial capital we may inhabit, the ritual and forms of that control do not vary across the Commonwealth: everywhere, even today, we celebrate some memorial of the former empire. The image and power of Queen Victoria, whom Annie (almost blasphemously!) describes as 'a wrinkled-up woman wearing a crown on her head and a neckful and armfuls of diamonds and pearls' (p. 40), puzzles both children until she is understood as the icon of an empire which is hard to shake, let alone subvert, even after independence. Once natura]ized, such obdience as these icons exact may even appear timeless. As Annie again explains, 'all of us celebrated Queen Victoria's birthday, even though she had been dead a long time' (p. 76).

The signifying differences between the two texts must be read as the revelation of two distinct ways of organizing existence and of constituting the self in situations where that self is faced with extinction by the very processes of acculturation which all who nurture the child commend.[13] Each figural system, therefore, offers instruction on subversion. Each novel suggests ways in which a rebellion can be fought and won, appropriating the very forces and tools which the enemy - the school-system in each case - would use to impose order, submission

and obedience. And each child sets out to remake history with the understanding, in the words of Lamming's schoolboys, that 'If you going to make hist'ry you got to think how you doing it' (p. 48).

In the Castle of my Skin is about understanding - how the village operates and why, and how it might operate differently. Each time any character or group within the novel recognizes the limitations of conventional history lessons, that recognition reveals and announces a radically alternative view and shape of both history and the narrative line. Before the contradictory claims of their lives and their encoded learning can be resolved, for example, the boys must recognize the socially constructed impediments to their understanding. The problem they first encounter is that 'There was something formidable, even sacred about a book. Only truth, it seemed, could be put in print' (p. 92). And, thus, we recognize the self-reflexivity of this novel: it is the truth about which it writes, and writes because other books have excluded the boys and their village from history. The novel is an alternative, socially derived construction of truth. And, by definition and consensus, the novel is sacred.

Initially sure of 'his'ry' because they've read about William the Conqueror, the boys decide 'to make hist'ry by Foster Fence' (p. 48) by stoning the teacher, whom the narrator recognizes as dangerous because of the repression and erasure which pass for learning in his classroom but who, the narrator also recognizes, is only a part of a much larger pattern.

'Pattern' is the signifying convention here, and *In the Castle of my Skin* abounds with clear and very explicit considerations of such system-building and analysis. The major figure, 'the pattern', reveals G.'s growing consciousness of village life and how its constituent population and geography construct meaning in relationship to authority and to the town. Of course, once the pattern is understood, history can be revised by appropriating and modifying the patterns of that received discourse. As one of the boys explains, '"It ain't his'ry. It's common sense"' (p. 155).

As Lamming in a comparatively straightforward manner writes against history, revising the lies of Empire with the truths of communally shared, daily lives, so Kincaid also confronts this alien chronicle. Her analysis, however, is less materially dialectic, and her method more psychologlcally indirect. Lamming's novel is organized in 'chunks' of experience, each laying the foundation for the next, and each grounded in the analysis of the socio-economic systems of empire and its attendant histories.

Annie John eschews the 'materiality' of *In the Castle of my Skin* to offer a variation on the classroom's history lessons which is woman-centered

and psychologically organized. Kincaid's novel is consequently very different of access.[14]

The real connection between the two novels' conception of history, however, begins with Annie's fascination with books, reminding us how Lamming's boys worried about the irreversible 'sacredness' of the published artifact. Annie's world is also mediated by a multiplicity of other texts: the library books which she pilfers and stores under the house, the childhood books which determine what she calls her friends and how she imagines the future, and the illustrated history books which figure so prominently in the classroom.

The chapter 'Columbus in Chains', in particular, foregrounds this intertextuality and the concerns of Kincaid's text to dislodge the kinds of history which Europe and previous writers - everyone, black or white, male - offer Annie. For example, a teacher amuses herself by reading an 'elaborately illustrated' edition of *The Tempest*, ignoring her students and neglecting her duties (p. 39).

One is tempted by such a casual reference to read the figural system of colonialism, usurpation, racism and the continued legacy of domination which Prospero and Caliban have clearly represented to other Caribbean writers such as Lamming: but Annie's reveries do not work by such direct reference and association. What must be understood is most frequently withheld. Here, for example, we must consider just what elaborate illustration Annie has surreptitiously glimpsed. If we can imagine it to be Caliban, depicted as African and slave, then we begin to understand what follows.

Like Lamming's schoolboys whose history begins in 1066, Annie has a primer for her history lessons: another lavishly illustrated text, *Roman Britain*, a chronicle of the conquering system's past which she must learn. In Annie's reverie, escape from that nightmare of history through homoerotic daydream is interrupted by demands for propriety and decorum. The lesson is carried semiotically, not narratively.

For example, in one of the many visual puns with which the novel abounds, punishment is reversed. Annie believes that the dunce cap looks regal on her young friend and is reminded of an illustration in yet another book she has read. This trick - the reversal of an image which condemns to an image which celebrates - prefigures the troping we approach with each seemingly casual aside in this chapter.

The same themes proliferate and are disrupted: fathers and daughters, England and the West Indies, history and discipline, memory and the present, ancestors and children, Africa and missionaries, eroticism and shame. The lessons, it seems, are embodied in various texts: learning to transgress their surface imagery determines our survival. For Annie John, nothing is as it seems or what it purports to be.

At the heart of the labyrinth, Annie imagines an alternative history, not found in any of the official books, but understood and transmitted outside the classroom:

> 'Of course, sometimes, with our teachers and our books, it was hard for us to tell on which side we really now belonged - with the masters of the slaves - for it was all history, it was all in the past, and everybody behaved differently now... But we, the descendants of the slaves, knew quite well what had really happened, and I was sure that if the tables had been turned we would have acted differently; I was sure that if our ancestors had gone from Africa to Europe and come upon the people living there, they would have taken a proper interest in the Europeans on first seeing them, and said, "How nice", and then gone home to tell their friends about it.' (p. 76)

Schooling and the illusions of independence and liberal progress operate to erase history/difference. History is the past, not the present. In history there is class and race war, but in the present we are all the same. Annie has understood the lessons of late capitalism very thoroughly, and can translate theoretical concepts such as bourgeois individualism and the liberal hegemony into an everyday language which her classmates and readers can easily follow without demur. Annie, as descendant of slaves and unlike Lamming's schoolboys, is very much aware of the truth and can envisage a more civilized encounter, with proper behaviour, between the adventurer and the defenseless.

And we are at the heart of the new inscription of history in *Annie John*, for now comes the long description of Columbus in the picture: another illustrated text from official history. Again, information is withheld but we understand that Columbus is an inflatedly important figure in local history. For the schoolchildren, this is when history begins. The education system, like the history which determines what is taught, is blindly eurocentric, silent about Africa and contemporary Antigua. Outside, the women go about their lives, nurturing, feeding, and fostering Annie's schooling which is figured as the rising up, the rejection of and moving on from such limited discourses. The schoolroom's instruction is a deadly lie, drawing Annie on to a final confrontation as she seeks relief from the discourse of European history by resorting to the visual. The novel's critique of classroom history focuses on the usurped iconography of Empire.

What matters is not the familiarity of the narrative but the violence of the image: Columbus takes a whole page, pictured as illogically elegant, in the guise of the slave (p. 77). His image is written over the opposing discourse, to deny it.

The image of Columbus effaces the crimes of Europe by appropriating the figure and signification of African slaves. 'Gold' is the dominant

feature of his dress, immediately contextualized by Miss Edward's outcry that these present Antiguan girls are 'worthless' (p. 77): it was their deemed worthlessness that led to their enslavement which led to the filling of Europe's coffers with the gold that can be worn for adornment and as a systemic code of wealth, but more importantly superiority and power over the girls who might daydream and thus wander away from the textual history to the pictures for relief. The 'triumph' of that discourse resides in the easy familiarity with which its main figures can invade the daydreams of a pre-adolescent Antiguan schoolgirl, doing her best to avoid listening to a history class.

Annie describes Columbus as 'dejected and miserable', his feet and hands 'bound up in chains' and he 'fettered in chains attached to the bottom of a ship': the arrogance of this iconography is its most appalling feature. Here, the Middle Passage is travestied, enacted by its instigator in a history chronicle which denies place or importance to the African past. For in this figuration of the European conqueror/instigator of history, Annie reads her own people and is moved to joy at the reversal of roles - a fantasy she entertained in the immediately preceding paragraph: 'if the tables had been turned we would have acted differently' (p. 76).

The history book, rather than imposing its discourse on Annie, invades her discourse but, paradoxically, offers her the image and model of how to confront and decenter - to trope - the very domination it pictures: 'elaborately illustrated', indeed!

Annie John's strategy for unseating power is far different from Lamming's boys' plans for seizing it. Whereas Lamming mastered the forms of discourse in order to write an alternative system into being - in the same legitimating mode of colonial histories, Kincaid sidesteps such obvious combat, refusing the mire of that rhetoric. Instead, Annie transposes her mother's words onto the text, across the picture.

Columbus was written over Africa, and a believable history: he usurped the figure, worth, minds and voices of those whose history he so tragically initiated by discovering the West Indies and claiming the territory for Europe. Annie defaces his text in a justifiable act of retribution which spurns codes of propriety and property and, not incidentally, affirms the community of women whose hope she is.

In other words, her graffiti earns Annie corporal punishment but frees her imagination from the chains of imperial history. The women outside are in the classroom with Annie, asserting their cultural truths, collective experience and lived knowledge against the school system's lies.

NOTES

1. See Stephen Slemon and Helen Tiffin, 'Introduction' to *After Europe: Essays in Post-Colonial Criticism* (Dangaroo Press, 1989).
2. This is certainly one implication, for example, of Barbara Christian's essay 'The Race for Theory', in *Cultural Critique* 6 (Spring 1987), pp. 51-63.
3. This problematic is treated throughout *After Europe*, cited in note 1 above. See also Wole Soyinka, 'The critic and society: Barthes, leftocracy and other mythologies' in *Black Literature and Literary Theory*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (New York and London: Methuen, 1984), pp. 27-57.
4. This production-consumption image is indebted to Julianne Burton, 'Marginal cinemas and mainstream critical theory', in *Screen* 26.3-4 (May-August 1985), pp. 2-21.
5. George Lamming, *In the Castle of my Skin* (London: Longman Drumbeat, 1979 and New York: Shocken Books, 1983). Subsequent references cited parenthetically in text: both editions have the same pagination.
6. Jamaica Kincaid, *Annie John* (New York and Scarborough, Ontario: New American Library, 1986). Subsequent references cited parenthetically in text.
7. See Suzanne Moore, 'Getting a Bit of the Other: the Pimps of Post-modernism' in *Male Order: Unwrapping Masculinity*, ed. Rowena Chapman and Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1988), pp. 165-192. See also Louise Spence and Robert Stam, 'Colonialism, Racism and Representation' in *Screen* 24.6 (November-December 1983), pp. 2-20.
8. George Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile* (London and New York: Allison and Busby, 1984), p. 36.
9. George Lamminq, 'Introduction' to *In the Castle of my Skin* (New York: Shocken Books, 1983), p. xi.
10. This concept of an end to 'reading as tourism' previously described the complexities visited upon readers and interpreters of Euro-American literatures by the avant-garde. I have appropriated it to describe instead earlier, often anthropological approaches to reading emergent literatures from the formerly colonized world - a practice which inscribes the 'literariness' of Western writing and the relative insignificance of other literatures. Geoffrey Hartman, *Criticism in the Wilderness: The Study of Literature Today* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1980), p. 19.
11. Similarly, Ngugi wa Thiong'o defines African literature by its ability to confront and revise history in *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: James Currey and Nairobi: Heinemann Kenya, 1986). Malek Alloula offers an example of confrontation and writing over in *The Colonial Harem*, translated by Myrna and Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986). See also Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice In Post-Colonial Literatures* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989).
12. The withholding of information is implicit throughout the novel. For example, the reasons for the mother's departure from her home and island at a young age are never given; her joy at the news of her father's downfall is linked iconographically to Annie's simultaneous defacing of the pictures in her history book. The link here is suggestive and never explicit, despite the eponymous heroine's frank and often graphic descriptions of her own adolescence.
13. 'Everyone recognizes that the way one makes sense of history is important in determining what politics one will credit as realistic, practicable, and socially

responsible'. Hayden White, 'The Politics of Historical Interpretation: Discipline and De-Sublimation' in *The Politics of Interpretation*, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 135.

14. '...Woman's place within the discipline and as subject of history is *different* from man's all along the race-class spectrum, and ... a woman's right to "imagine" history is fraught with perils of a different kind." Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Politics of Interpretations' in *The Politics of Interpretations*, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell (Chicao and London: The University of Chicago Press 1983), p. 362.

KAMAU BRATHWAITE

Meridian

The full moon wake me out of my deep sleep of space just before 3 in the morning to a blameless sky through my window, the BBC still on in the room & I heard Mora Singh (didn't catch her name right) giving a chrystal clear picture of a Brittanico-Indian actress' blues on Meridian (she mentioned Bob Marley in a quiet passion of words embracing her history & went on, as crystal & clear as the night, as I say, to describe the moment when her parents became real/real to her & when she, because of this, moved from 'invisible' to visibleShe had been away from home - had left home during a vacation, in fact, against her parents wishes - they had wanted her to spend that 'precious time' with them but she had gone off with an actors goulp where for the first time she was able to enjoy a real variety of parts playing Victorian English, Indian of course & Calibbean (I think she referred to a New York performance of a play by Caryll Phillips) & had retuned to find her mother mortally ill The parents knowing & respecting her commitment to her art, had not informed her of the fatal illness of their heart, so that she was now back home with the shock of it, holding, feeling & suddenly *knowing* that this frail woman - her mother - was not the pale passive sari-wrapt stereotype failed immigrant from a stale wasted continent of mahatmas & maharajahs, three-storied bejewelled elephants, floods & thin brown *dhoti* starvelings, but that they - for it was both of them - mother & father that she now be/held - were real brave complexities with their own compersona of root, drought, monsoon, bullock, sudden dust storm of darkness near Delhi, cup of prayer in the palm of the wayside fire

& in the time she had left with them, she began to ask them to tell her - for the first time - about them/*selves* & it all came out came out: this new real world wonderful people - who had always been there - not at all the faceless sham/ the faceless shame/ful of the schoolbooks who had be/come her head, her heart, her fingers' nervous consciousness, trying to be invisible to others all those adolescent years - head down, back slooped, flingers in the cupboard of her pockets - trying to be like - *& be liked by* - the white bullies of the neighbourhood etc etc etc & *so shame* when her mother take her hand & farward to the playground one time to face dem down & all this our own story, told & heard year after year after year, generation after generation, it seems, without cringe, without change, without charge, without hope, even if in differing accents, timbres, tunes of the Third World's ios &

yet - perhaps - there was a change - sign - chance - hope - like the sky through the head of my window suddenly awake in the eye of the moon - because

the BBC -Voice of Authority - if not of Hopi Indians - but perhaps, though - some sort of Hope - was 'allowing' this, had read it in manuscript, in typescript, in superscript, had checked it out in their editors' rooms with Mrs Thatcher's mandates pinned to the breasts of their green baize walls & were sending it out - *transmitting* is the usual word - in this criss clear late summer air with only the full moon watching, listening, perhaps even waking me up - who knows - to hear what Mora was saying &

tuning my head when the story was done, like at the slowly end of a dream, I wished some luck of silver to the lune/when I see, in that bright totally unexpected clear,

shining more brilliant than any cloudless sky - shining in fact without any competition of pleiades or other shape of star that midnight morning full moon sky so bright, so bright, no other beam, I say, could shine into my eye - I see, I say - those two - so bright - these travellers of light - size of a pin-head - two heads really - like magnified to the brightness of a star - two stars really - side by side

meteors

& there was this long long brilliant blaze or tail or trail behind them in its haze of light, at first of equal length, it seemed, & equal width, quietly quietly humming towards the moon, their double wails of silence streaming backwards from their twinned unblinking eye & double nucleii across the moonlight brightness of the sky across my August window, my own eye following & following across the twenty hundred thousand miles or more of sky until I couldn't see its end above the roof & blocked-out sky & couldn't get the window open up to look out from its square of dark because it had this Harvard wire mesh meshed in in front its sash of glass like in the Ancient Tropics

so that you couldn't open it up & push your head out as you could, say, in Italy or India or the Caribbean & perhaps even from the BBC's

Broadcasting House

in summer, I don't know, but I could imagine how it stretched across my skin how many many miles & more

& so I decided that when Meridian done - & they were now talking about *experimental work in drama at this year's Edinburgh* ('Edinburough', 'Edinboro') *Festival* especially an Italian director's **Macbeth** which had been produced in like three living volumes - venues - the theatre, then somewhere else - can't remember where because my mind was now so torn by now by the sky & the happenings up there & wondering how many people people were seeing it that time of summer night & I guess that by now someone must have phoned the police & the newspapers - some one always seems to phone the *polizei* & *klook klook klook klook - **klook** in the sky - you can't miss its long swift blowing desert by the moon*

& there was like this spearhead of light just behind that double star & helix pointing at the moon

S.

that while Meridian was still on & talking about the third venue - an island in the Firth of Forth, I think it was & how the vision of the Bridge - over the Firth - isn't that one of the great bridges of the world? of the Industrial Revolution? of the Modem World? though not part of the scenario - was

somehow like part of it - the play - the theatre - inc - orporated into the very Festival's Palatinate & Palatino celebration of Shakespeare's *ecosse* Scotland - the island itself, somewhere out there beyond even the star-crossed wavelengths of the BBC *Where the Norweyan banners flout the sky &* where the water must have been very cold, murky even, from the *'dour colour of the stone'* out of which it comes, spawning brown hook-mouth trout & Nessies welcomes us with fires on the water - like memories against the glaze & avalanches of the Ice Age - the fires burning on the music of the water & along the water's edge with **Verdi's Requiem** & version of the play/the radio was saying & all against the background - backdrop, really - of a 'fantastic sunset' -

& all against the frontdoor/window of these meteors across the foreground of my forehead & how one trail was shorter now & fainter & less broad than was the other - or was it my imagination - no - one trail or tail was shorter now, more 'junior-like' - or so it seemed - though both - they kept their equal diamant

& with the wooden quadrants of my window, I could judge how fast how fast they moving - though you know how it is with things in the sky - even aeroplanes in certain places, certain times, seem to fly in the same spot forever

& of course, at first, when I opened my eyes & saw the sky, it *was* a plane - no - two planes - flying there near & next to each other, side by side, with two white navigation

lights on, bright & probably going in to land at Logan Airport with their two long slipstreams behind them at that time of cold & colour in the sky

& I was listening for the sound of their engines though at that height you probably wouldn't hear them & at that angle & as I said, they seemed to be moving so slowly that it seemed sometimes they did not move at all

& why were they so close together - that was very unusual xcept for the showing-off sessions at airshows

& it was only then that I realized - recognized - that *these were no airlines* but what the sky-fi books call 'interplanetary visitors' - which perhaps is why they were so bright, so swift & seemingly unmovingly together - two very near & distant planets moving at terrific rush through space & not towards the Logan Airport but the moon

& I could see that - see them - feel them - almost hear them - guaging their curve of movement from the wooden quadrants of my window

& I was getting anxious to get up get out out of bed out of the warm & dream of the room & be out out out side on the side/walk & into the red/world, as it were, so that I could look up at like the real/sky, not just the sky through the head of my window & I knew I couldn't go on

listening & listening to Meridian though I wasn't really listening & could see from the square little black watch that I kept waiting by my bed near the radio that it was still

four
minutes to go before
3:00
in the morning

before Meridian ended

but suppose something happened before that like the 'phenomenon' *stopped* - though I didn't think, from my xperience, that sidereal (as distinct from *surrealist*) events, taking place so many millions of light years away, hardly ever suddenly 'stopped' as easily as brakes, say, or balancing acts or castles of cards in the air - I mean it was not like a cracker or the carnival at Carnaveral or star

light that you held in November fingers, their sharp little flickers of diamond teeth snapp/ing like harmless against your feast

&
yet - yet - you couldn't be sure
I mean you could imagine the mmmmmmmmmm & speeeeeeed of the limitless power of these star-war perhaps even star-weary meters of light enter/ing into the land/scape of our continent

but there wasn't any *tick* there/there wasn't any

noise

in their engines

& that, I realize, was the difference between 'earthly things' or 'lings' like the black digital beside my bed & 'things in other dimensions' like fish in their author or listening to dreams or watching that double-headed all-lit-up 'heavenly body' rushing towards the floodlid lands of the clouds around the Harvard moon

& why was I using all these big words like sidereal & quotidian & *surrealist* & quinquenoctial which I didn't even *know* in the dream & can't even spell & I mean *what's going on*

because normally when you see the moon you wish & wonder if your loved one or loved ones are seeing it too & when I opened my eyes from the dream & *I thought of you too*

but as soon as I saw these space-wrecked glaciers it is as if it was a private show & something confined to the sky of my room & I wondered why be/cause if the moon could be seen all over the world & that same moon had been seen even before by people in India & Bangladesh & the BBC or wherever the summam came from before it reaches us from over the horizon of time/zones or what/ever -

then surely all over the world they would be seeing these meteors too or hearing them in their hearts But we it seems - have never been able to share comets or

meteors or shooting stars - not even *aurora borealis* - or the sun for that matter - xcept in eclipse - or in 'temperate zones' in 'very good weather' - when you come to think of it -

in the way we share the moon

but these meteors, these other, outer, uttar visitors,

these really*strangers* - perhaps even daggers or *'dangers* - as in **Macbeth** - xcitements unexpected, too silently intense to share

something perhaps to do with the heavens - or heaven - & how it takes us out of the our sleeves - I don't really know or understand - but I know that I was getting increasingly impatient with Meridian for not finishing - as if Time would never come to an end - & - *yes* - I began to worry - despite my earlier ?cool & what after all if the meteors finish before Meridian done!

They had like appeared so easily out of my sleep & there had been no war or warning about them not even a whisp or whisper of prediction upon the cloudless weather forecasts though as soon as I had opened my eyes to the moon I remembered one guy - a slim brown skin smiling TV whetherman - though all witherpeople on TV (can't remember seeing a woman in any of my dreams) seemed required - or requested - certainly *determined* - to smile, to be 'happy', to be up-beat - *'up-market'* as they saying now & some carry on carry on as if they was *maniacs*

& I remember this fore/caster not because of his cast but because he was the one who quipped back fast to one of his (white) colleagues on one of the Networks who was trying a ting - one of those lime-lame improvize jokes at the end of the News?

it was like

8.8.88

the day Fergie's daughter was born & the Americans as usual had gone ga-ga (*Queen TimePeople Enquierer* etc etc) & were giving 'The Event' as much airtime as baseball or anti-tartar toothpaste & they had pronounced her name - Mary Elizabeth Beatrice Alexandria - a whole long dynasty of forebearers & how after all that she would probably be known as B & this clown was saying that if she was a good little girl & become granny's pet she might become

Queen B

Get it?

Queen Bee?

Queen Bee?

when our brown skin spay come right back

bax

without blacksing a eye

with

only a **wasp** *could say*

something like dat

.

so no wonder I remember this guy & im forecast a few weeks ago about A Big Bermuda High & Full Moon Tonight etc etc

but no hint of comets -

so that - who knows - I was perhaps witnessing something out of the xtraordinary & I almost switched on the radio - the one in my living room/working room/waking room - not the one next to my bed that was still playing Meridian - to see if there was any *news* - though the media, I notice, with perhaps the xception of Awesome Welles & some of the builders of the

pyr  mids

hardly ever caught up with anything out of the until well after the event - unless of course they had themselves perdicted it or publicized it - like an eclipse or the alphabets of hurricanes or Haley's (Halley's) Comet

& so I thought I better get up & put on some clothers & get out & see for meself since I didn't want to miss what/ever was happening out of the xtraordinary high up above the casement of my house

& in anycase, I said to myself, why should I be giving priority to something inside the radio or radar of my head when something 'raw' was happening outside in the sky - or was it outside of the sky - & I couldn't really sit waiting & waiting for the last four minutes of Meridian to finish when I wasn't even listening & I could dress in the meantime & in the end I didn't even hear the end of programme even though from like the eye-corner of my ears I could hear them going on about jazz & jazz festivals & matching or marching bands like in New Orleans

though this was still the Edinborough Festival & as I was leaving the apartment I heard them saying that after the News there was going to be some more music this time some Indian music no not by Ravi Shankar but by a name beginning like Shif

but as the BBC's General Overseas Service seems to enjoy saying -

just when you are getting interested & settling down into what they are doing so well - though by this time I had stooped listening even though I had been trying - as you must have noticed - to do both things at once & there must be a moral or miracle in there some time soon -

this
transmission is now closing & *listeners in Australasia*

where I am sure there are many - *don't their flags have plenty stars in their sky* & not crowded & set out in order rows like in the United States of America - *should now* turn or *tune* to so many thousa

 at one time I used to try to see if I could get these palaces on that same little computerize Sony I had been listening to Meridian on but nothing ever came out but the static I suppose of Australasian stars  by now I was through the door  down the steps  down the steps  through the street  back down onto the earth of the pavement in front & below my apart/ment & I looked up at the sky & saw nothing nothing nothing there but swirling clouds like on Creation Morning  so I thought that it must be over the house especially since the night was getting like cloudy okay? so I crossed over to the other Nile of the street - I suppose it was - though I can't be sure anymore & there was nothing there neither - neither moon nor sizzling stars as if they had swallowed each other  it was only then that I knew that when I

had first come out of the house & looked anxiously up from the somewhat unsteady feet of the pavement x/pecting to see all that light, the wonder of comets of morning, the miles & miles of its trail across a sky so whitened & brilliant it could make you blind

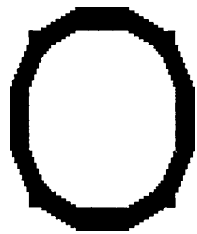
that I had seen like between myself & the sky like an empty pool, dryly & like drably jutting out of my dream as I crossed slowly back to my side of the pavement, my flat face staring up into the dark empty space - no - yes - I hadn't been wrong - of a flagpole - a long steel metal flagpool jutting out from the front of the apartment above me - above mine - had never noticed it before - but the building apposite had one too & on the 4th of July I had seen an ever patriotic - even dutiful - Stars & Stripes draped proudly & flying from it - next to the doll of a small naked legba or girl that some lampooning lamposting student had guillotined there on that crossroads of space, climbing & clambering outer & onto his life & his limbo, it seems, to achieve

& it was only then that I began to confirm - in a way I began to *conform* -that that whole night through, rused from my dreams by the now absent moon, I had been looking at light thrown onto the sky not from the whisper of plumets that had opened my eyes, not even from radio fires on the distant island of Skye - but from the everyday light of the everynight streets re/flected upon that flag-pole of white/steel & that that everyday light, catching the tips of the pool had created those close two gemini stars in my head & that that short thinner staple behind them had burnished the speartip of light

& that the main body & shaft of that banner of night, indented & cleft along its long length like the balancing

muscles or scales on either side of your spine, were the two simple ropes of the halyard dividing itself in the sky into that doubling stream of the snake of the universe flowing with counterless stars towards the black hole of the moom

yet as I sit here this morning trying to wrestle these words back to dream I look across at there isn't a doll at the end of that halyard not even a pool or a flagpole jutt- ing out from the night of the building; only a red rusty bracket or crayfish of metal with a large caterpillar or little dead tadpole or flesh playing down from its fetish or totem on a slowly dwindling wire or sing as if I had witnessed a midnight Meridian too crowded too distant too tundra & cowl & too glitter & cold for any memo or saving or sense of what we call *caritas* - charity - love as I



pen my eyes from the deep sleep of space & hear in the silence that follows the rain or the passage of stars or Meridian pain, Shif Kumar Sharma & HariPersad Charvarsia, praying their morning raga

The Private Landscape of Meaning or the Public Landscape of Politics: Stephen Gray Interviews Dan Jacobson

There is at this present time in South Africa [September 1985] such a thirst for people who have positive things to say about the past. Have you returned in our hour of crisis to do so?

The things I have to say about the past in my recent autobiography, *Time and Time Again*, are not all positive. The book is not a rosy one about my own past, or indeed the country as a whole. How can any life looked at backwards be rosy in hue? As far as the crisis is concerned: it is clearly a chronic one, though it has spells of greater or lesser intensity. It's a running illness whose end I don't see. I think the patient is changing character at the moment very rapidly, but I certainly don't feel that the illness is abating.

As for the book, it is on the whole a rather private and domestic and intimate one. When I say 'private' I don't mean that it's inaccessible at all to the reader. On the contrary, I would wish the experiences of childhood and boyhood, and of early manhood and later manhood, that it describes to be those which everybody can recognize quite readily.

At the same time many of those experiences, though not all, took place within the framework of the kind of society we have in South Africa. That framework is rendered in the book so far as it's necessary for it to be rendered. I was not concerned to make it 'relevant' in the way in which a lot of the media demand everything be relevant nowadays. I don't apologize for this - on the contrary - but the combination of the crisis and of the book, and of my being here to promote it, has meant that people link these three things together in a very brisk way, or are inclined to do so. So part of the time I have to be saying 'Well, it's not like that'. And not only *here* I may say: some of the responses the book has drawn in England have been of a 'How dare I?...' variety. How could I write a book much of which is set in South Africa, about South Africa, and which doesn't answer to the reviewers' sense of the South African situation? They know what writing out of South Africa and about South Africa must look like, and this book failed to meet

their expectations. Well, hard lines... this book is an autobiography - an episodic autobiography - it is about some of my deepest memories. These *are* what my deep memories are, and I am *not* going to be told by anybody that: a) Those are not my deep memories, and b) I have no business to write about them.

Can we talk a little about the formal aspects of the work? Would you call it a memoir?

I suppose memoir would be a suitable word, except that in this piece, as in all the pieces, I did try to make them rather more narrational somehow - if that word makes sense - than the term 'memoir' implies. In other words, a memoir is something almost like a piece of crochet work that you can pick up and put down, whereas I wanted these to be like stories. However, articulating what I was up to came at a later stage. At the time I was working on this piece, I wasn't even all that far into it - and I suddenly thought: you know, this is the way it could be done. Why think of an autobiography as sequential and complete? Why not do it in these episodes of great intensity, or what I hoped would be episodes of great intensity, one after the other, and then put them together in chronological form, and then let them, as it were, speak *to each other* within the book? I must say almost immediately, having thought of this, I had one of those experiences which all writers have - alas, I have them all too rarely - when ideas simply came forward, pleading to be dealt with, one after the other. It was a kind of creative élan, really, that took hold of me. It's embarrassing to talk in these terms, because in the end it's the reader who has to decide whether there was a genuine creative élan there, not me. But all I can say is what it felt like. And, you know, when that happens to you you are very grateful, you go on, you seize the opportunity, you ride on the wave ... or whatever other formulaic phrase one might wish to use in this connection. Another point is that this was a way of writing about South Africa.

Why?

Because in fact I haven't written about South Africa, certainly not in fiction, for something like twenty years. It's twenty years since I wrote *The Beginners*, and my later books have not been South African. They've not even been in the mode in which I wrote when I was writing about South Africa, which is a straightforward, naturalistic one.

So you were returning to that first mode?

Yes, but in a different, directly autobiographical manner. So not only was I writing short stories, I was also writing again about South Africa; about the South Africa *I knew*. You see, one reason why I previously couldn't go on writing fiction about South Africa was that I simply felt I was too far from it, I wasn't intimate enough with it. This was the consequence of having picked myself up and gone elsewhere. But the South Africa which appears in this book couldn't be more intimate than it is, because it is the South Africa of my childhood. It's the one I know best.

Of course we mustn't distort the book in talking about it: much of it is set in London. One aspect of this return to the story-like form, I've no doubt, is that it also enabled me to write about London in a particular way.

Can one say that what emerges from this is your major theme of the bi-polarity of your life - the London life, the South African life?

Well, I suppose the two states in a way could be generalized as the provincial and the metropolitan. This is an obvious way of looking at it. The South Africa which appears in the book is particularly provincial, because, living in Kimberley as we did, we felt ourselves to be in the provinces *vis-à-vis* Johannesburg, which was the nearest big city and which was the place where almost all the members of my parents' family were. There *we* were without any family, immediate family, near kin, in Kimberley, which was a small town and a kind of abandoned town. So one really felt oneself, growing up as a child, to be at a remove. Now, those feelings of isolation, of being at a remove, were in a curious way re-enacted when I went to London. I didn't have family there, but I had, one might say, a culture there, or I came into a culture, which I had been experiencing always at a remove. All this is one version of the standard provincial-metropolitan experience; of the ambitious young man from the backveld going into the big city and seeking his fortune. This is what I was doing. I see it now and I saw it as a young man. London was a confrontation with an immense city, an immense past, an immense culture and an immense social pyramid - or social set of snakes and ladders - which it would be something to try to negotiate in whatever terms one could, and given whatever talents one had, or hoped one had or wished one had or told oneself one might possibly have.

However, the polarity between the province and the metropolis can be seen in another but quite closely related way. It's the polarity be-

tween childhood and adulthood. Because I've spent my childhood in the one place and my adulthood in the other, and so these two territories become also the territories of time, so to speak.

There's a built-in situation of childhood dependency in the far-flung ex-colonies, and of maturity and sophistication and adulthood in the place where you were an adult.

Yes, yes I would accept that. The maternal figure of the ancient culture was also that of the ancient *ruler* of the countries in which we grew up. The Kimberley I describe in the book was one in which we were brought up to believe that we were sons of the Empire and all that stuff, and it was there in London where Big Ben chimed and Churchill's voice orated that grown-up events took place...

Do you view that double personality as a strength or an inhibition?

I find it very difficult to imagine myself having become a writer had I stayed in South Africa. This is the irony of it. This sometimes strikes people as being paradoxical or even perverse, but it is what I feel. I know for myself, in myself, that it was really quite imperious, my wish to get away and to go and live in England.

Was that because the scene was stagnant here, or to gain a perspective?

I don't know. It was partly because I disliked intensely the political dispensation which had come into existence here and which was clearly going to be immovable for a long time. (And which now appears to have started crumbling from within.) I hated it, it depressed me. I couldn't see myself spending my life struggling against it, because I've never wished to be involved in public life, in political life. Basically I just found it very depressing, the whole prospect of it. On the other hand I had already been to England, and I had liked it, and I'd felt liberated by it, and I'd responded to the sense of historical depth and of social depth - of a social complexity very different in kind from the social complexities we have here.

Do you feel on this visit you have found a South African readership?

I have been pleased, touched, and surprised to find that my work somehow hadn't - as I'd assumed - sunk beneath the horizon of everybody's consciousness here, and that people knew of it. They know more of the earlier work, obviously, which is explicitly South African in

nature, but something of the other work, too. And they have spoken about it with great warmth and interest.

You were very outspoken in the '60s and '70s about the direction of the modern novel. Is it dying; no, it's not dying, it's assuming new forms. What do you feel about this relationship within yourself, your own personal development as a novelist?

The naturalistic mode still has great vitality. Critics - perhaps myself, too, when I've written critically - are always inclined to say this has had its moment, we have a new moment now and hence need a new mode. But things are not that neat, ever. Writers should not necessarily attend to these pronouncements. For myself, though, I did feel a kind of irresponsibility in *not* writing about South Africa which I was glad to exploit. By that I mean that South Africa as a subject seemed to press on one in two very strong ways. The first was that it had been relatively little written about; or rather, it was relatively little written about thirty, forty years ago; and therefore one had a responsibility to try to render its surfaces as best one could. They had a kind of appeal or a kind of pathos, even, that one had to respond to. They hadn't had their words given to them yet. And there was an obligation on anybody who was writing about them to do that primary task.

Would you call that documentation and description?

Yes.

Cataloguing and enumeration?

That makes it sound more cold-blooded than it is. Because it's quite a strong emotion you feel when you look out across the veld, the Northern Cape veld, and you see those tufts of grass, and the antheaps of a particular reddish colour, and a wire fence. And those little pieces of wire which are like rings on the strands of the fence. I don't know what it is in the process of fence-making that produces them. The wire runs through them and yet they are quite loose. Do you know the ones I mean?

The barbs?

No, not the barbs. This is not a barbed-wire fence we are speaking about. I've never written about this, or even thought about it before, and I don't know why I've suddenly seized on it with such passion. An

ordinary fence, an ordinary four-stranded fence. Obviously in the tying of the strands to the fence-posts there would be surplus curls of wire, each time, which would simply be nipped off, and then would be left as a ring on the strand. These always fascinated me as a kid, I've now realized. Sometimes there were many of them and you could run them all together with your fingers.

A veld abacus.

Yes, exactly like an abacus, exactly.

For counting sheep...

Well there it is. I didn't know I'd remembered these until we started talking about them. If I'd found your word or phrase, an abacus, or abacus-like rings, and described how as a boy I would send them hurtling from the one fence-post to the next, I would have been delighted. Because it's never been described, nobody knows about it.

Anyway, that was the one responsibility one felt in writing about South Africa. The other responsibility, I need hardly say, was to THE SITUATION with a capital T and capital S, indeed the whole thing in capitals. So when I say that in the other writing I've done I have felt a sense of escape or release or irresponsibility, I don't mean it in any pejorative way. Far from it. To be free of those pressures was perhaps to be free to attend to other, internal needs which might otherwise never have been known to me.

Yes, but when one says something like the responsibility to THE SITUATION it implies that there are certain things you have to say and certain...

No, that is what people often assume to be the case. I meant something slightly different: that it's very difficult to escape from writing about it; in order to show that you are a serious person, it must somehow become the very theme of your work. That's really what I had in mind, rather than implying that you then have to adopt such and such a political stance.

But would you see that as a burdensome response?

When I was no longer writing about South Africa, I discovered that I had felt it as something of a burden.

Yes, but it's a bit simplistic to... I mean some South African books are received in such a simplistic way, measured solely in terms of right and wrong responses to the situation.

One mustn't be too grand about these things. If the situation is as intense and as tormented and as morally complex and as humanly lacerated as it is here, how can you not feel responsible towards it?

One of your themes is memory and the selectivities of memory. You're in fact in Time and Time Again *jumping backwards over the apartheid situation to a pre- or proto-apartheid state. Could you just tease that out a bit?*

You have described accurately the society in which I grew up by calling it a prototype-apartheid one. It was one in which race distinction was institutionalized; but it hadn't yet become an ideology in the way it was to be, and so rigidly formalized as a consequence of the ideological formulation. And that is what I was writing about; I was answering to the facts of my autobiography: I grew up in the proto-apartheid South Africa. However, I would hope that what is said in the book about it would enable the reader to see that apartheid didn't come from nowhere. Not only in the sense that it could build on what was already existing, institutionally. It could also build very readily on what was already existing in people's minds.

Finally, the last one, the connection between the criticism, academic activities, essays and the fictional side of you - do you feel the one feeds the other or are they separate?

Well, I feel on the whole that they're pretty separate. Though I'll say this, that any writing is like any writing; in other words, that if I were to be writing a critical essay I would have something of the same feelings of relief when it opens up, disappointment when it closes down, something of the same anxiety to achieve a kind of formal coherence or even grace, if one can use such a word about one's own work. All that applies to whatever you write.

Steven Heighton

PATPHONG ROAD (#1)

She comes through the door with tiny numbers
tattooed on her arm, I believe Dachau
could have applied them no more neatly
and I wonder
who deals in these figures
some anonymous pinstripe syndicate or maybe
this barker whose blunt face pulses
red under tubes of gas, so hollow

so hollow a part of you wants to fist
and shatter these advertisements
scatter skinthin glass over Patphong Road
though it would shock no one, nothing does
there a million other hollow tubes
and two more Patphong Roads, besides

a part of you would really prefer
to fuck these women
whose nights are numbered, lined
like felons at a one-way screen
a part of you
would really prefer
to put on night like a festival mask
in a street where you're unknown, the member
of a larger client:
Us
in the inkblack
margins of profit, to the tourist board
that works this street
a number

Bangkok

SKY BURIAL

Hide of stone slabs, slopes in mist
swooping down to temple yards
to a thousand small cairns like the graves of eagles -

Off the mountain birds soar in hungry loops,
mandalas in thin air, prayer kites
whirling before the plunge -

Each day someone dies in Lhasa
by dawn they are out to render him air
give her to sky and birds that are the sky's hunger
so as the thud of an axe dies off
and birds coil downward in patient spools
you seem to see a form feathered on air, a figure

free at last to straddle
updrafts off the mountainhead, slough hides of stone, grey
slabs, slip free

of skin, as a monk at his dying might
walk from monastery walls
that were never more than a method and training
into ascetic hills above the high plain, over
cairns and scriptured cliffs
to throw off like stained paper his maroon
robes:
receive the wind

The primary form of funeral in Tibet involves hacking a corpse into small segments, which are then left to the mountain birds. Within a few hours only the bones remain; they are ground and mixed with the barley flour tsampa *that was the dead person's staple in life and now constitutes the soil to which he or she is returned...*

INUKSHUK

We found him first in early spring

standing alone under the eye-
teeth of an inland range

a stunted form, bewildered
by the longer shadows of peaks
he cast
an image, dim
as a minute hand

and circled hours on snow -

We passed him again in August
on a wide plain rimmed
with brilliant hills

worn smaller now, the body
rimed with lichen, limbs
blunt gestures of shale -

quarried once in the low hills
he had been changed
the tundra conspiring around him

to this
dune of rubble
like sand in an hourglass

we tracked his gaze to the lowland

and September, with the new hail
cobbling the seacoast
we found him at last, eroded
gray as beached bone

a dwarf
aging among barrows, he

saw us push from shore
leaving as his makers had

his face could not even accuse
but bore betrayal
with the amazed endurance
of a likeness, unfinished
or a forgotten god.

Inukshuk *are man-like stone cairns erected thousands of years ago by the ancestors of modern Inuit to divert migrating caribou and mark the routes to the sea. The word means 'like a man'.*

CATHERINE J. FENN

Sitting in the Club Car Drinking Rum and Karma-Kola: Subverting Tradition as Beginning

Patricia Waugh, in *Metafiction: the Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*,[1] defines the metafictional novel in terms which are useful when considering Paulette Jiles' novel *Sitting in the Club Car Drinking Rum and Karma-Kola* (*Club Car*).[2] In simplest terms, metafiction is 'fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an arteface in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality' (p. 2). Jiles invites her audience to take part in the very process of her writing. We, as readers, are aware that Jiles' text is artifice. She is self-conscious about that text, the process of writing it, and the manner in which it appears on the printed page in book form. I would suggest that the appeal of *Club Car* lies, not only in its playfulness and humour, but also in the premium Jiles places on the role of the reader. Jiles allows the reader the same freedom which, as author, she demands for herself. We are asked to contemplate that which is being presented and, consequently, Jiles challenges traditional notions of fiction, fictional representation, and the employment of stereotypes. Through this text, the playfulness of which knows no bounds, Jiles subverts traditional forms of narrative fiction dislodging the critical consciousness of her audience in the process. We are forced to think about what we are reading, the manner in which it is presented to us, and what we expect from it. In her discussion of 'frames and frame-breaking', Waugh suggests that 'each metafictional novel is a fictional *Mythologies* which, like Roland Barthes' work, aims to unsettle our convictions about the relative status of 'truth' and 'fiction' (p. 34). Moreover, the kind of fictional playfulness which occurs in *Club Car* provides us with a means of re-evaluating what Waugh refers to as 'the traditional procedures of communication and allows release from established patterns' (p. 36). An analysis of Jiles' text will provide evidence of how the reader is made aware of its metafictionality and how the text, as metafiction, disrupts the psychological, cultural, and historical assumptions we bring to our reading of a fictional work.

In capturing her audience's attention, Jiles achieves a two-fold success: her audience will be entertained and their expectations of a fictional work will be challenged. Her parodic treatment of cinematic and dramatic techniques, and narrative conventions will be given support through the willing participation of her audience. Peter Nichols, a contemporary British playwright, comments in an introduction to his own work that 'some thought has always been given to casting the audience, a method that works best when they're not allowed to settle comfortably into any one role. It's one way of accepting, while at the same time exploiting, the limitations of the form' (p. xiv). Although the form to which Nichols refers is drama, I would sugest that Jiles casts her audience with the same self-consciousness: we are not allowed to settle into any one role, and particularly not that of the 'passive consumer' (Waugh, p. 13). Further, *Club Car* draws on the traditional form of the novel, while, at once, exploiting that form.

It seems to me that our assumptions about the novel, in genera], are disrupted before we even begin to read *Club Car*. The self-reflexive title and the mock dust cover (the publisher chose to glue the cover on my edition) call attention to the 'bookishness' of this book. And the photograph of Jiles *frames* her within the context of a train window wearing a pillbox hat (her heroine's prop). Jiles' flippant attitude toward her work is apparent from the very outset: she pokes fun at the fictional illusion to which we have yet to be introduced. Once into the text, we further recognize its self-consciousness. Iconographically, we are constantly reminded that the fictional illusion presented to us is one of a train trip. An architectonic plan is provided so that we might learn our way around the central metaphor of that illusion: the club car. And in Shandean fashion (though Jiles' train is amoral in contrast to Sterne's moralizing fingers!), the icon of the train appears with each scene heading, headings which, in themselves, are self-revealing.

Through the actual structure (or in this case, deconstruction) of the narrative, we are aware from the outset that Jiles intends to parody and exploit almost every plot technique with which we are familiar. At once, she employs the standard techniques of cinematic, dramatic, and literary media. Her employment of scene headings is Brechtian: they are explanatory yet are more humourous than they are alienating. The breaking up of the novel into a series of vignettes lends it a dramatic quality: *Club Car* is comprised of scenic units which, at times, function as stage or film directions. Further, the opening scenes employ the figurative system of the 1940's cinematic leave-taking scene at a train station: the only thing missing is 'whistling steam' emitting from the very page itself! The storyline (as it were) exploits the romance film and detective-plot narrative which were so popular in that period. Again,

the iconographic train points us in the direction in which we should turn the page. The metaphoric and figurative trains, however, remain the closest things to any sense of linearity to this text. Though Jiles' characters are confined within a train and to the rails on which it travels, our imaginations and the author's thoughts are not. And when she appears in danger of becoming a little traditional, the author quickly chastises herself and presents a solution on which her heroine then acts: *'Oh bizarro...this is turning into plain icky regular prose fiction...* What can you do but get up and walk away from it when things are turning plain icky and regular. "Excuse me," she says, and gets up and walks out of the bar in time to some very offbeat rhythms...' (p. 25).

Jiles' manipulation of the narrative is obvious on a number of levels: at times explicit and, at others, implicit. The following example shows the complexity of her construction. Jiles directly addresses her audience, comments on fiction as illusion, and confuses the author and heroine in just two sentences: 'She has the capacity to invent stories, as long as she has an audience, as long as she has you, the reader, for whom to invent them. They are often outrageous lies, having gone beyond the bounds of "story", but they are engaging and oddly believable' (p. 7). Jiles' playfulness extends from the external, physical existence of the book through to the internal structuring of it: in the use of headings, narrative manipulation, and in the very essentials of language. (I particularly like her use of parenthetical parentheses; p. 24.) She interrupts the plot to ask why she has interrupted the plot: 'for the plot, of course' (p. 16). And throughout the text, we are exposed to the self-consciousness of its typography. *Italics*, s p a c i n g, and UPPERCASE type are used for **emphasis**, and repetition 'just keeps happening over and over, it just keeps happening over and over' (p 71).

The characters, too, are self-conscious about their roles, histories, and stories. Jiles places them in a state of flux, avoiding the use of 'pin-downable' types. She presents us with stereotypes while simultaneously undermining them. We are never quite sure who these people are, where they are from, or, indeed, where they are headed. The absolutes of stereotypes, and those of the conventional prose narrative, with its predetermined sense of development and closure, are continually being denied us:

> She's guarded behind her glossy contemporary stereotype; she's loving every minute of being encased in that expensive binding like a book somebody is giving a big sell. He wants her to come out of the character she's playing. *Will you come out of there,* he would say to her, *and give me a straight answer?* (There is no straight answer.) But the story of his pursuit is becoming so compelling that he can't remember his ending. (There is no ending.) (p. 53)

In continually referring to the practice of employing stereotypes, Jiles points to our dependence on them as representatives of reality. She forces us to question the validity of such 'typing'. She parodies and breaks the frame in which these stereotypes generally function causing the reader to make a distinction between fiction (and fictional illusion), and the reality it traditionally purports to represent (as in the nineteenth-century realistic novel). Waugh suggests that 'in providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text' (p. 2). I would suggest that this is precisely what Jiles' text asks us to do. Metafiction, and in particular *Club Car*, functions as a means of deconstructing assumptions about reality. Jiles, in undermining her own characters and their 'stories', denies the reader the comfort of coming to a definitive interpretation of them or the text. Jiles suggests, ultimately, that absolute truth and reality cannot exist - we are left not with absolutes, only differing perspectives. Moreover, in constantly referring to itself as an illusion, *Club Car* does not provide the reader with any given reference point from which to define it: this text is a curious subversion of traditional notions of fiction and reality, finally avoiding an absolute resting place. *Club Car* is a detective novel, a romance story, a film script, and a stage play. And, paradoxically, it is none of these forms, in a traditional sense, since Jiles undermines their conventions at every turn through parody, hunour, self-reflection, and intrusive commentary. In the process of exploiting (and subverting) the conventions of creating a fictional illusion, methods of characterization, and mode of presentation, Jiles succeeds, I would suggest, in deconstructing our assumptions about fiction: What we expect from it and how we respond to it as a representation of reality. Jiles' text defies definition (exception perhaps as metafiction). Its off-the-wall humour and textual manipulation disrupts the cultural and psychological assumptions which we bring to the reading of it. Waugh refers to these assumptions as 'implicit cultural and literary codes which are activated by the reader in the reading process' (p. 66).

I think it is reasonable to assert that *Sitting in the Club Car Drinking Rum and Karma-Kola* is the culmination of a development in Canadian literature which began self-consciously with A.J.M. Smith. Smith's poetry smashed, with unequalled determination, the conventions of the Romantic tendencies of the poets who preceded him. Crossing genres and periods of the twentieth century, this development of breaking with the more formal and rigid practices of an earlier period is evident in the works of Hugh MacLennan, A.M. Klein, Rick Salutin, George Ryga, Joy Kogawa, and Timothy Findley, to name just a few. These writers,

in turn, have questioned the absolutes of literary conventions, mythical and historical assumptions, and cultural perspectives. This questioning is manifested as innovative and alternative treatments of history in MacLennan's *Barometer Rising*, Salutin's *1837*, and Kogawa's *Obasan*; in Findley's manipulation of myth in *Not Wanted on the Voyage*; in Klein's metapoetic novel *The Second Scroll*; and in rendering a deconstruction of cultural assumptions in *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* by Ryga. Jiles, in a short, but deceptively rich and complex text, manages to synthesize and exploit the techniques used by these writers. While drawing on the literary and cinematic conventions which preceded her, as the basis for her parody, Jiles succeeds in debunking myths established by those conventions. Her work is, at once, engaging, disruptive, humourous, and provocative.

Waugh writes 'if metafiction is to be seen as a positive stage in the development of the novel, then its relevance and sensitivity to the increasing and diverse manifestations of self-consciousness in the culture as a whole have to be established (p. 28). I think Jiles has established the relevance of metafiction to the larger cultural consciousness in which it functions. Although it does not explicitly comment on otherness as it occur in the Canadian context, *Club Car* (and works like it) can successfully disrupt the type of cultural and psychological patterns which can be detrimental to functioning in a multi-cultural socity, and the increasingly syncretic global experience. In literary terms, the dismantling of the traditional or conventional novel form through the manipulation of narrative, stereotypes, form and content, does not suggest that the novel as genre has reached its limitations. Rather, in producing a metafictional work, Jiles asserts that the possibilities of the novel have not been exhausted, and that, in essence, the novelistic form is both dynamic and regenerative in a Bakhtinian sense. Moreover, this particular work is of profound significance to the development of Canadian literature. At worst, Jiles' readers are entertained. But the sensitive reader will recognize that this text is more than just playful prose. It forces us to question our assumptions about reality and fiction by disrupting sometimes narrow and often destructive literary and cultural perceptions.

In Jilesian fashion, it is appopriate that *Club Car* is not resolved and that we leave it at 'The Beginning'.

NOTES

1. Paulette Jiles, *Sitting in the Club Car Drinking Rum and Karma-Kola: a Manual of Etiquette For Ladies Crossing Canada by Train* (Winlaw, B.C.: Polestar Press, 1986). Further references to this work are given after quotations in the text.
2. Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: the Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (London: Methuen, 1984). Further references to this work are given after quotations in the text.

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John Haynes

FAMILY

My wife, sah, she go work for you for house,
sweep sah, for you, wash plate, she go iron.
My pickin dem dey fit go come carry ting:
na beer, na milk. Sah, mastah, you deh alone...

So they arrived, their bundles on their heads;
the breasty daughter and the little tattered
boys with silver skulls; bowls, bed timbers,
sacks, the big chested dogs that bayed at night,

and which at dawn Taru the man led off to hunt.
His wife hacked up logs for cooking with an axe
swung high and thwucked in close beside her toes.
Corn was spread out to dry like yellow rugs.

First light was the crack back of their padlock,
bashings of buckets, taps, grass hissing, krorks,
of hens, the children's giggles in the walls,
and then the brush's itch and itch across the porch.

They themselves I hardly ever saw.
There'd be the washed up dishes left to shine,
And over the thorns, with seams like millipedes,
spreadeagled trousers that I didn't know were mine.

FOLK VISION

Shot of trousered aliens. Then him:
Grammarless Man: the bare feet on the bough.
Them again: moving through his cocoa plants.
Him: blurring beyond leaves. Them: climbing
up the tree house rope into his stare.

Gold. Gold. Look, their nugget.
'Go,' he says, 'You, you go.'
Of course they don't. And natives get them.
Then there are straining whites of eyes
against gags. And drums going.

But they are us and he must save them in the end.
He must trapeze against the glittering and pouring leaves
like dreaming from that umbilical liana.
His Australian crawl must crash across the river.
He must kill the crocodile, summon up the herds,
and then vault the stockade, yelling out of the sky,
his nakedness invulnerable, as the drums cut.
Under the screaming tusks the huts disintegrate.

Next day, changed, washed in the stream, in turn
they're thanking him. Shot of his plantation.
Their aircraft struggling upwards in its iron
and the curtains are being drawn, light on,
chair turning solid again as THE END
largens in the sky and the speck of them's
still vanishing away into faces
like reflected spirits on the screen.

Spirits slipping at the rims of mugs.
And deepest down their cocoa tastes of home.

DEREK WRIGHT

Parents and Power in Nuruddin Farah's *Dictatorship* Trilogy

Nuruddin Farah has never been one of those African writers who have looked to the traditional past for refuge and sanctuary from the evils of the post-colonial era and his fiction has been slow to recognize the positive strengths and reconstructive potential of traditional cultural values and modes of expression. Certainly, he has not conceived the latter as unsullied alternatives and possible modes of counter-discourse to the corruption, political tyranny and neo-imperialism which have overtaken his native Somalia since Syad Barre's Soviet-backed coup of 1969. Rather, the traditional forms have been implicated in the new trials and terrors of the independent state. In *Sweet and Sour Milk*, the first novel of the trilogy *Variations on the Theme of an African Dictatorship*, the repressive surveillance techniques and police terror of the General's military dictatorship thrive on the predominantly oral techniques of a still largely illiterate society, so that the oral tradition is effectively allied with the reactionary forces of tribal authoritarianism and obscurantism, and it is not until the Dulman episode of *Sardines* that the revolutionary possibilities of the oral mode are really explored. Moreover, throughout the trilogy the new political totalitarianism which post-revolutionary Somalia has drifted into is revealed to be but the old patriarchal (and matriarchal) despotism of the Somali family writ large, and the General is seen to answer to, and to represent something authentic in, Somali life. The collusion of family and state authoritarianism, and of domestic and political patriarchy, have become commonplaces of Farah's fiction.

The world which the reader is plunged into in *Sweet and Sour Milk* is simultaneously a tangled network of patriarchal and polygamous kinship structures presided over by a tribal oligarchy and a demented, deranged political nightmare of Orwellian unpersons, dawn disappearances and rearranged history controlled by a psychotic dictator. In the Prologue to the novel Soyaan Keynaan, economic adviser to the President, dies, apparently poisoned at a dinner with a government minister. By falsifying his last words and the facts of his life, the regime then

immediately proceeds to turn the dead man into a revolutionary hero, an undertaking which his father, ex-policeman and now informer to the dictatorship, is only too happy to collaborate with. Soyaan's twin brother Loyaan, a country dentist with no experience of the labyrinthine passages of political life, embarks upon a reconstruction of the events of Soyaan's last weeks. From coded messages in his brother's diary, a seditious memorandum hidden in his clothes and evidence scrambled together from Soyaan's mistress, a fellow conspirator and a suspicious doctor, it becomes apparent that the dead man had been a leading figure in subversive, anti-Soviet activities and was probably murdered, with the aid of a Russian doctor, as part of a government plot. In the atmosphere of fear and suspicion sown by the dictator, however, Loyaan is unable to trust the testimony of any of Soyaan's confederates and confidantes, and, after a futile interrogative assault on the minister who was present at Soyaan's last meal and a brief spell of detention, his lone quest for the truth peters out inconclusively with the government's decision to pack him off to Belgrade as a 'diplomat' in the Soviet embassy. The exact motive and manner of Soyaan's death remain unknown and, as Loyaan awaits his departure, the novel ends with an ominous, ambiguous knock on the door.

Of first importance throughout these proceedings is the Somali family. Specifically, the oral network of 'Dionysius's Ear' uncovered in Soyaan's Memorandum - a security corps of spies and informers recruited from illiterates working in the oral tradition and reporting rumour and hearsay - is rooted in domestic tradition. Soyaan's fellow-conspirator Ibrahim explains that the 'ears' planted by the security system 'sprout in every homestead': in the absence of trade unions and other organized protest groups, informers are pressed from the family unit by threats to the safety of its members. At a more general and pervasive level, the novel devotes so much attention to the workings of families for the reason that familial and national politics are interdependent and mutually supportive. Farah insists that, for all the vaunted egalitarianism of Somalia's traditional political institutions, the authoritarian family structure at the roots of Somalian society conditions people to the tyranny officially endorsed and institutionalized by military regimes. The twin repressive institutions of family and state invoke each other's authority and sanction each other's violence. After Farah's usual fair-minded fashion, the patriarchal dragons, like the matriarchal ones of the next book, are allowed to have their say. 'You have no common ideology and no principles,' the father Keynaan tells Loyaan, anticipating what Idil says to Samater in *Sardines*. 'You work for the interests of the countries in which you received your academic training.'[1] There is at least some truth in the first part of this statement: the new generation of dissidents

that looks to Western liberal humanism for its inspiration has little of its own to put in the place of the coherent tribal heritage which the Soviet-backed ideologues are careful to keep intact and appropriate for their own uses. Nevertheless, Farah is unrelenting in his pinpointing of patriarchal bigotry and brutality as the sources of current political authoritarianism and police-state terrorism. Closely linked by his dealings with those prime political patriarchs, the General and the Minister to the Presidency, Keynaan combines the roles of ex-torturer and paid informer to the regime and terrorizer of his wives and children. He appears to conspire with or at least connive at the death and defamation of his son, harmlessly dissolving Soyaan's secret subversive activities by allowing him to become posthumously a property of the state, a '*son* of the revolution'. The embodiment of political and paternal tyranny in the same person makes for the efficient stamping out of subversion, simultaneously, at both public and private, state and familial levels. Along this patriarchal continuum, sexual power is seen as another extension and manifestation of political power. Somalia is a country where a widow (Beydan) is forced by the government to marry the policeman (Keynaan) who has murdered her husband, and where a woman (Amina in the next novel in the series) is pressed hard to marry one of the political dissidents who has raped her (rape is a political act and female circumcision one of its many forms). In *Sweet and Sour Milk* power is presented as a captive mistress who is pandered to, courted and finally seized by the General, and village brides are offered up to the sadistic whims of visiting African dictators like Amin: 'Come: take this key, the symbol of power, and open the clean and shaven legs of our womanhood. Come: take this sceptre, use it as the whip for the sado-masochistic rite to which you've been honourably invited' (p. 186). The Minister of Police, unwrapping a cigar, 'broke its polythene with the same cruelty as a rapist would deflower a virgin' (p. 180).

Farah has said in an interview that *Sweet and Sour Milk* is about those who do not compromise whilst *Sardines*, the next novel in the trilogy, is about those who do.[2] Switching focus from fathers and sons to mothers and daughters, and from patriarchs to matriarchs, *Sardines* plots the paths of that compromise. The crucial compromising agent, however, remains the power of the familial and domestic context, now claustrophobically intensified by the helplessness of the Somali woman's position in society. Women such as Medina and Ebla own houses in Somalia but are allowed no public or political presence; drawing their strength from quite different sources, these two are in fact untypically independent figures in a culture where the position of women is negotiated entirely by their fathers, husbands and brothers. In such a society it is permissable for a rape victim to be regarded by her assailants, as

is the woman Amina, as a mere attribute or appendage of her father ('We're doing this not to you but your father,' they tell her), and for the crime to remain unpunishable and politically non-existent because of the low evaluation of the victim. Following the elimination of Soyaan and Loyaan by death and exile, it is now the turn of the women in Farah's overlapping, discontinuous narrative to take up the struggle against the regime, but in *Sardines* active resistance has given way to a beleaguered impotence and the protests are more gestural than effectual: editing the General's speeches in the national newspaper, abandoning house and husband, withdrawal from the national swimming team and, more dangerously, painting the dawn with anti-government slogans. Accordingly, the punishments and penances parcelled out to a group styled as 'inferior beings' by the regime are more moderate than death, prison or exile: for the central figure Medina, virtual house arrest; for the now middle-aged Ebla, the silence of the self-censoring private conscience, 'worn on the inside'; for Xaddia, Medina's sister-in-law, the pseudo-exile of work as an air hostess.

A summary of the plot of *Sardines* does scant justice to the novel's poetic intricacy or to the complexity of its intellectual debate. Removed from her position of editor and placed under a banning order for tampering with the regime's national editorials, Medina flees with her eight-year-old daughter Ubax to the house of her brother Nasser, leaving her house and husband at the mercy of her tyrannical mother-in-law Idil. The latter has threatened to have Ubax circumcised and her husband Samater, to avert a political purge of his kinsmen, has reluctantly accepted a position in the government and has thus compromised Medina, who is writing a book criticizing the regime. Idil promptly brings into the house a replacement wife for her son, whereupon Samater throws her out and, in the process, brings the wrath of the regime down upon his head: he is stripped of his office, arrested and brutally interrogated. Medina, meanwhile, imparts doctrine to and debates tactics with her intellectual proteges and, like one such disciple (Ebla's daughter Sagal), continues to influence events from the sidelines whilst others become the casualties of her quest for freedom. Not she but her brother Nasser and the singer Dulman are arrested and sentenced to death for disseminating subversive material; in parallel fashion, her pupil Sagal stands agonizing by whilst her competitors in the Somalian swimming team are arrested for painting incendiary slogans. In the novel's uncertain ending, Samater is released from captivity and returns to reconstitute the broken nuclear family, putting at least one house back in order: 'Medina, Samater, and Ubax behaved as though they needed one another's company...'[3]

Sardines teases out and pinpoints unerringly all the hypocrisies of compromise. Accepting the post of Minister of Constructions to prevent the decimation of his tribesmen, Samater tries to hide behind the pretence that he is really helping to moderate tyranny from within but knows in his heart that truth must be owned: 'We the intellectuals are the betrayers; we the so-called intellectuals are the entrance the foreign powers use so as to dominate, designate, name and label; we the intellectuals are the ones who tell our people lies.... We are the ones that keep dictators in power' (p. 72). The indecisive Sagal finds her thunder stolen by her rivals and, already pregnant by a visiting West Indian photographer who has compromised with the regime, can do no more than feebly withdraw from the championship, whereupon another girl is immediately nominated in her place. Meanwhile, Medina, by using the national newspaper as a vehicle of protest within three days of taking up the editorship, does exactly what is expected of her and acts out the General's scenario for her silencing: 'Medina was offered the pen with which she wrote herself off,' comments the astute Ebla (p. 41). By then abandoning Samater to the monomaniacal Idil, she succeeds only in precipitating the conflict between husband and mother-in-law which will lead to Samater's public disgrace and detention. That these things, and the arrest of Nasser and Dulman, happen as a result of her own actions and lie upon her own conscience seem not to occur to her for the greater part of the book, through which Medina steers a charmed and blithely unconcerned passage. Protected as she is by her privileged position as one of the country's leading writers and intellectuals and aware that the worst that can happen to her are banning orders and sexual harrassment from Samater's kinsmen, she can afford to lambast the General as 'backward and fascist' and 'an uneducated imbecile' and do much else that is politically simplistic and productive of nothing except for her own self-glorification. At the extremes of the picture, moving beyond compromise to total sell-out, are the Italian journalist Sandra and the black American Atta, respectively the credulous white stooge and black spy of the 'revolution' and both mistresses of the same government minister: these two connive at tribal elitism, clan nepotism and the Islamic subjugation of women in the name of Marxism and Africanity ('my race remembers'), both of which the dictatorship lays claim to at different times.

Medina's consciousness, exasperatingly, occupies the largest space in this portrait of embattled Somali womanhood: in fact, characters such as Sandra and Atta, who appear in only a couple of scenes, have virtually no existence outside of her characterisation of them and seem to exist merely to prove true what she says about them. Medina's status in the novel is, accordingly, problematized, for Farah has warned us in

the early pages of her egotistical possessiveness towards her daughter and the self-absorbed ideological purity of all her actions: she appears to leave husband and home not only because of Idil's threat to circumcize Ubax but because she cannot write a book critical of the government whilst married to and living in the same house as one of its ministers. No account is taken by her of the extenuating factors of Samater's dilemma, which raises the awkward question of whether she expected him to allow his clansmen to be wiped out. In terms of hard facts, Medina's challenges to the regime are merely flamboyant and self-indulgent ideological gestures which leave the enemy (Idil, the General) in possession of the spoils (Samater, Somalia) and which, as Xaddia observes, others usually pay the price of:

> 'You pawn and pawn and pawn until there is nothing or nobody left to put up to auction. Yesterday, it was Samater; today, Nasser and Dulman; tomorrow - who knows? - maybe it's my turn; the day after tomorrow, Sagal. When will you stop being obstinate and start seeing reason? Will you never concede or accept defeat?' (p. 246)

The problem is that so much of the narrative is presented from the perspective of this intransigent idealism and coloured by Medina's priggish self-righteousness that these, particularly in the closing paragraphs of the book, come to have a ring of doctrinal finality and authorial approval: 'Medina a hostess? Why, when she altered the position of the chair the house fell in on her and the ground below her shook with seismic determination. No, she wasn't a guest any more. She was a full and active participant in the history of her country' (p. 250). Has Medina, from the boundaried isolation of her private room, really shaken the Somalian earth on which her house stands? What has she finally achieved apart from the private fulfilment of a renuclearized family and how long will it be before the General takes punitive action against his disgraced minister? Is Farah's closing chorus of praise genuine or ironic?

If the answer is not a simple one it is because the sealed sardine tin of Somali society, denying women a public outlet, forces then inward into a suffocating intimacy and this generates such a tangled network of inter-relationships and conflicts - personal, political and religious - that no single character or set of relations can be considered and evaluated in isolation. *Sardines* is Farah's most formidably planned, patterned and argumentative novel (though what is finally proved may not be clear). It pairs off mothers and daughters (Medina and Fatima, Sagal and Ebla, Ubax and Medina) more painstakingly than the brothers and sisters of the previous book and breaks down a large cast of characters into couples facing each other over poles of interest which define

their identities and oppositions: Medina and Idil over Ubax; Idil and Samater over Medina; Medina and the General, like lizards in their 'varanian dance of death', over the destiny of Somalia. In his analogical treatment of character, and most especially of Medina, lies the full complexity of Farah's vision, for the oppositions drawn up are complementary rather than diametric or absolute and reveal continuity at the heart of apparent contrast. Packed inescapably together as they are in their claustrophobic casing, all the women are aspects of one another, forcibly alike to the extent that they are all in the same tin: the outcome is that all become, in some way, part of a single repressed but irrepressible Somali character.

Farah has said that 'everyone contains different things - the woman in the child, the man in the woman and so on', that in his novels 'an intellectual and psychological debate is going on between two selves - the woman's self in the man, the man's self in the woman'.[4] Thus Westernization brings out the latent feminine in Samater and the masculine in Medina, a theme to be explored further in the interchanging sexual roles of Salaado and Hilaal, Misra and Askar in *Maps*. The motherless intellectual figurehead Medina sees herself as complementing the fatherless athletic torchbearer Sagal, as the childless parent and parentless child will do in *Maps*; Sagal is also seen as teenage protege and proxy by Medina (with Ubax as a younger version) and, under her mentorship, as successor and inheritor in the struggle against dictatorship. Even in the novel's sliding scale of maternal authority, which ranges from Idil's psychopathic domination through the moderate Fatima's non-interference to Ebla's enlightened tolerance, the categories prove to be more fluid than fixed. Hence the liberal adaptability which we might expect from the free Somali nomad we find instead in the purdah-strangled Yemeni woman from the Arabic tradition (Fatima), and the obsessive rigidity looked for in the purdah-victim is discovered to be entrenched in the nomad (Idil).

Similarly, Sagal and Medina partake of the natures of their opponents. Sagal invokes the 'sacrificial element of history-martyrdom' in her celebration of her rival swimmers' heroics, thus espousing the regime's own 'mother-martyr mentality' which she affects to despise and incurring her mother's pragmatic rebuke: 'I would say they succeeded if they wrote their message and got away' (p. 128). Medina, in Samater's reverie, is identified with a cosmopolitan eclecticism which clutches at the flowers of different cultures but prefers not to be rooted in any of them, and there is some justification in Gerald Moore's argument that such a person, not deeply in and of the society but wilfully seeking 'a life defined like the boundaries of a property', has little claim to its intellectual leadership.[5] Yet the truth is that, for all her foreign

education, Medina's attitudes and temperament are rooted deeper in Somali culture than she herself is aware of. She is described in the beginning as 'unbending', as the female equivalent of her father Barkhadle: 'She was as confident as a patriarch in the rightness of all her decisions' (p. 5). Although Farah would appear to have a preference for the nuclear over the extended family and pins his faith to the displacement of authoritarian methods of socialization by egalitarian ones, he demonstrates that the single-parent variant of the nuclear unit can be as dictatorial as the clan-based polygamous one. The freedom which Medina forces prematurely upon Ubax is at times almost as oppressive as the obedience Idil has forced upon Samater, her emotional and intellectual tyranny over her daughter as stifling as its physical counterpart, and it is perhaps no accident that Farah's metaphor for the freshly-translated world classics force-fed to her daughter - 'she gave them to her hot like maize cakes from the oven' (p. 3) - is taken straight from Idil's own entrepreneurial undertakings, supporting herself 'by baking maize cakes on commission from a restaurant' (p. 7). In a country of pontifical parents, Medina terrorizes her young daughter with knowledge, as does Idil with the circumcisional knife, and uses English and Italian to place her in a linguistic purdah which is the cultural equivalent of Fatima's religious one. Her Idil-like employment of her powers to interfere with and manipulate the lives of others (Sagal, Nasser, Dulman) casts her, in fact, as a new kind of matriarch.

'You are a prisoner of your principles, Medina,' her mother observes shrewdly. 'I am a prisoner of tradition, that I won't deny. One is always the prisoner of one thing or another' (p. 144). Compulsively ideologizing everything, Medina - and Sagal under her tutelage - fall victims to a confusion of the personal and the political that has become a standard feature of life in a state where it is not only no longer possible to challenge the dictator's powers but it is not even possible to disentangle personal affairs from his stranglehold on public life. Thus Sagal is tricked by her buoyant imagination into interpreting even her seduction of Wentworth George as a political act and wonders absurdly if she should 'have a child to prick the nation's conscience with guilt.... I felt it my national duty to keep the man company for that one night, and so I slept with him (pp. 116, 129). Clearly Sagal has learned well from Medina, in whose doctrinaire vision the whole of reality is political and all evils derive from and are to be explained in terms of the General's personality: 'The General is who I blame for everything.'

'Too simplistic, too categoric,' the author allows Samater his doubts but is himself not without his 'Medinizing' tendencies. Farah has said that he has 'used women as a symbol for Somalia because, when the women are free, then and only then can we talk about a free Somalia',[6]

and elsewhere: 'I see women as the symbol of the subjugated self in everyone of us.[7] The enslavement of Somali women can of course be seen as instrumental in, and therefore analogous to, the political repression of the whole Somali people: at an immediate practical level, the immensely powerful influence of women on the young is capable of damaging the national psyche and adversely effecting the nation's destiny if it is exercised by a class of people who are continually violated and degraded (a theme to be pursued in *Maps*). It is at a more abstract and doctrinaire level, however, that the Medina-Sagal theorem translates women victimized by clan patriarchy into metaphors for Somalia under the heel of tribal dictatorship. For them, and perhaps for Farah too, the issue at stake here is not economic class oppression (from his treatment of Sandra, Farah would appear to have few Marxist sympathies), but the oppression of women by patriarchal tribal oligarchies and of Somalia by the regime, which two things are at times so closely allied as to be virtually indistinguishable. The masses, women and children, 'like any inferior beings ... must be kept guessing,' said Medina's grandfather, anticipating the General (p.140). What the clan does to women the clannish dictator does to the nation: freedom from one will therefore automatically spell freedom from the other. Hence, it seems, the swift movement from microcosm to macrocosm in the two powerful anecdotes of Amina's unpunished rape and the brutal circumcision of the visiting American-Somali girl which together are made to sum up both the plight of Somali womanhood and, more tenuously, the condition of the Somali people, drawn up along broad politico-sexual lines: 'The pain is ours, the fat and wealth and power is the men's.' To her father's comment that this particular rape is political, Amina replies: 'But which rape isn't?' The choice of rape as a political weapon against the General by the three young rebels is significant partly because it indicates that they share his sexual politics, but principally in that Farah depicts rape as a re-enactment of the original circumcisional violation of womanhood which is an instrument of tribal patriarchal power over women. Hence the two are associated in the thoughts of Amina, which run the pain of the earlier violation into that of the later, and earlier in Medina's comment: 'Life for a circumcised woman is a series of deflowering pains, delivery pains and re-stitching pains' (pp. 119, 59). Thus perhaps, in Medina's doctrinaire vision, her two reasons for leaving her home - the protection of Ubax and Samater's forced acceptance of a place in the government - are really the same reason, since societies that terrorize women with circumcision also produce patriarchal monsters like the General. Hence her equation: 'Idil *in* the General; the personal *in* the political.' Yet the danger of this intellectual extrapolation of abstract or symbolic meanings from acts like rape and circumcision,

which is a constant feature of the novel's debates, is that the metaphoric correlative of the outrage - moral violation, political coercion - is liable to blunt the edge of the barbarity itself. A thing must first be itself before it can be made a symbol of something; it must be felt for what it is before Medina can abstract its 'significance'. Perhaps not unaware of this, Farah, without going into lurid details, makes the two barbarities suitably savage and shocking.

Medina's typifying and ideologizing approach to character and event explicitly formulates the links between parental and political tyranny which emerge more subtlely from the narrative of *Sweet and Sour Milk.* In *Sardines* the doctrinal axioms fly fast and furious: 'Power as a system, power as a function.... The sky would fall in on anyone who upset a pillar of society - in this case Idil' (Medina, p. 52); 'In an authoritarian state, the head of the family (matriarch or patriarch) plays a necessary and strong role; he or she represents the authority of the state' (Sagal, p. 62); 'There is one thing society will not forgive him: for disobeying the authority of an aged mother. Idil represents traditional authority, and it is in the old and not the young that society invests power' (Samater, p.23). The power system which is built into the Somali social fabric, and of which the General is merely a manifestation, is as evident in the passive powers of the matriarch - the right to be listened to and obeyed, the right to profit from her son's prosperity and not to be ejected from his house - as it is in the active ones of the patriarch, and political pressure will be brought to bear upon any member of the family who breaks with tradition. But Farah is sufficiently fair-minded to Idil to give her an existence beyond her political stereotype. Monster though she may be to the Western mind, her grasping materialism is made comprehensible in the context of her history of privation, and her responses to the Western challenge to her kind of civilisation at least score more points than Keynaan's in the previous book:

> I am what and who I am. I am the product of a tradition with a given coherence and solidity; you, of confusion and indecision.... What is more, your generation hasn't produced the genius who could work out and develop an alternative cultural philosophy acceptable to all the members of your rank and file; no genius to propose something with which you could replace what you've rejected. (pp. 77-78)

Idil cannot reasonably be expected to cast off her Islamic faith for a secular alternative or accept a son who cooks and lives off his wife's wealth in his wife's house. In the New Year Festival that envelops the novel the corpse of the slaughtered year, representing the senile old age institutionally invested with power by the regime, must be allowed to burn itself to ash before the youthful fires of renewal can be lit.

Moreover, the regime may not, in fact, be a monstrous aberration from Somali traditions since those traditions are at least better able to cope with dictatorship than the habits of Western individualism ('Tradition stays and wins in the end,' warns Idil). They are also, through the extended family's group economics and imperatives of hospitality and assistance, better equipped to deal with the crises of famine and refugees, though at a cost to privacy and property rights which Samater (and perhaps Farah himself) finds unacceptably high.

The same complementarity and antinomy attends the novel's analogic motifs of rooms and furniture, clocks and currents, lizards and beached whales. Across the elementalising typology taken by Fatima from the Arab tradition (in which Medina is fire and pillar, Nasser water, and Samater/shimbir the bird), this ambivalent imagery weaves a baroque course. Water, the element of Sagal as national swimming champion, is associated with moving currents and bridges to the future (Medina is imaged as a structure, Sagal as a process). But it also signifies the blur and rust of unreality which mark Sagal's hyper-active, over-inventive imagination, always 'wearing a watery grin, squinting slightly' at an imperceptive angle to reality (p. 44). Farah rings most of the changes, however, on the pervasive house-room-chairs complex of motifs. These radiate out in a series of concentric circles from the human brain, in which Medina's thoughts may walk up and down unhindered, to the 'room of one's own ... a room (and a century) in which one was not a guest', a separate inner space where patriarchy, matriarchy and the power of the regime have no place; to the claustrophobic domestic space in which Somali women are confined and where they must construct their own human reality to rival the political unreality outside ('In Medina's mind the world was reduced to a room'); thence to the stone 'city of righteousness' which takes in the Muslim religious meaning of Medina's name and the national house of Somalia overrun by Soviet 'white ants'; and, a few pages from the end, to the room which serves as a metaphor for Medina's selfish rearrangement of her own life, heedless of the effects on others who touch upon it:

> Medina has changed the position of a chair. That is all. She has created a habitat in which she alone can function, she has created a condition in which she alone can live. No room for either Samater or Ubax. How has she done this? She put the chair in the wrong place in the dark. When Samater awoke he stumbled on it and broke his neck. (p. 243)

In the course of these widening and shrinking spirals the motif gathers a fair weight of irony. Perhaps one of the 'bombs that explode in the face of the reader', to use Medina's phrase for good writing, is her telling argument with Xaddia, after which the closing claim that the

restructuring of her private world has shaken the state, making her at last 'a full and active participant in the history of her country', has a hollow ring.

After the focus on varying modes of matriarchy in *Sardines*, Farah closes his trilogy with a last look at the patriarchy and, perhaps to redress the balance of the first two books, presents what is a unique specimen in his writing: a patriarch who is not a tyrant. Up to this point in the trilogy the patriarchal model has been the grotesque Keynaan who in the first book mouths the General's banalities thus:

> I am the father. It is my prerogative to give life and death as I find fit. I've chosen to breathe life into Soyaan. And remember one thing, Loyaan: if I decide this minute to cut you in two, I can. The law of this land invests in men of my age the power. I am the Grand Patriarch. (p. 95)

Loyaan's recurring childhood memory of Keynaan tyrannically bursting the atlas-covered, egg-like ball played with by the twins not only contrasts the two generations' rival cosmologies of round and flat earths but opposes the fully-rounded human personality to the 'flatness' of ignorance and propaganda, and the creative potency of the still fertile brain to the anti-creative, brute force of the 'Grand Patriarch'. For the latter the round world is 'an egg that awaits your breaking it'; he chooses to 'breathe life' not into his dead son but into a lie that travesties his life (pp. 103, 110). Keynaan is a destructive, life-denying force. But in Deeriye, the hero of *Close Sesame*,[8] Farah gives us patriarchy with a human face and his most endearing hero. The familiar doubling of children and parents couples in this work the two sons, Mursal and Mukhtaar, and their respective fathers. Whilst Mukhtaar's father is the prototypical patriarch who both gives and takes his son's life, Deeriye is at once devout Muslim and traditional Somali, loving monogamous husband still mourning his dead wife and beloved grandfather living harmoniously with children and grandchildren in a non-authoritarian household. Most importantly, though his own period of political activism is in the distant colonial past - he is a veteran and national hero of resistance to the Italians - he remains an outspoken opponent of the General's regime.

Meanwhile, the active opposition to the dictatorship is carried out, as in the other two novels, by the younger generation and though the gestural protest of *Sardines* has here graduated to full conspiracy, the results are as ineffectual. Deeriye dies at the end of the book after living just long enough to see his son, a remnant of the underground Group of Ten, die a futile death, but not before certain positive strengths in traditional Somali culture have been celebrated. Foremost among these are the heritage of anti-colonial struggle that makes

Deeriye a traditional rallying point and source of opposition to tyranny, and the Islamic ideology of brotherhood and neighbourliness which, as instanced in the Mursal-Mukhtaar friendship, cuts across tribal divisions and demonstrates that the power of a divide-and-rule regime is not absolute and unchallengable. But at least of equal importance for the vision of the trilogy as a whole is the positing, through Deeriye's behaviour in the family and at the Council of Chiefs, of an alternative, non-authoritarian model for both the domestic and the national household; parents, in their dispensation of domestic power, pose the most significant threat to the totalitarian power of the state because it depends upon them to validate its authority. None of these forces, no more than the questing integrity of young manhood in the first book and the vitality of Somali womanhood in the second, suffice to overthrow the General. But Farah, in his valediction to African dictatorship, wants them to be noticed, praised and viewed as possible sources of hope before he moves on to the Ogaden of the next trilogy.

NOTES

1. Nuruddin Farah, *Sweet and Sour Milk* (London: Heinemann, 1980), p. 93. Further page references are given in parentheses in the text of the article.
2. Nuruddin Farah, 'Arts and Africa', no. 305P, BBC African Service transcript (London).
3. Nuruddin Farah, *Sardines* (London: Heinemann, 1982), p. 250. Further page references are given in parentheses in the text of the article.
4. Nuruddin Farah, 'Mapping the Psyche' (Interview with Robert Moss), *West Africa*, 1 September 1986, pp. 1827-28.
5. Gerald Moore, 'Nomads and Feminists: The Novels of Nuruddin Farah', *International Fiction Review* 11,1 (1984), p. 11.
6. Nuruddin Farah, 'Author in Search of an Identity' (Interview), *New African*, December 1981, p. 61.
7. Farah, 'Mapping the Psyche', p. 1828.
8. Nuruddin Farah, *Close Sesame* (London: Allison & Busby, 1983).

KANCHANA UGBABE

The Visual Image of the Child in Western and African Art

It is assumed that before about the middle of the seventeenth century the symbol of the child or indeed any sort of awareness of childhood was non-existent in the Western world, the child being then a shadowy figure, existing in the periphery, unimportant, therefore unattended. 'Rational man in conflict with an impersonal universe was the theme of pre-romantic literature,' writes the critic of Henry James, 'the unformed, unthinking child had no role to play in it.'[1] Peter Coveney's observation on the treatment of children as subsidiary elements in an adult world is that 'until the last decades of the eighteenth century the child did not exist as an important and continuous theme in English literature.'[2] Not only among literateurs but even among social historians, the child seems to have been rated insignificant. Peter Laslett, while recognizing the fact that children were abundantly present in pre-industrial times, notes,

> there is something mysterious about the silence of all these multitudes of babes in arms, toddlers and adolescents in the statements men made at the time about their own experience. Children appear, of course, but so seldom and in such an indefinite way that we know very little indeed about child nurture in pre-industrial times, and no confident promise can be made of knowledge yet to come.[3]

That children died in large numbers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries appears to reinforce several writers' opinion of the obscurity of childhood in pre-industrial times. Laslett adds, 'It is in fact an effort of the mind to remember all the time that children were always present in such numbers in the traditional world, nearly half the whole community living in a condition of semi-obliteration, many of them never destined to become persons at all.'[4]

Artistic representation of childhood in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance confirm the notion that children were treated as 'miniature adults' who appear 'childish' only in comparison with the adult. The child is seldom the principal subject of the picture; his presence is a

detail in a complex scene as in Crivelli's *The Annunciation* (15th century).[5] Funeral monuments in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries served not only as tableaux asserting birth and lineage but were important as family records. It was possible to trace a man's ancestry from the elaborate display of heraldry and coat-of-arms on his tomb; further the monument often bore figures of his wife and children on it. The child did not at first appear on his own tomb but on that of his parents.[6] He was generally depicted as a diminutive creature by his mother's side or at his parents' feet. The rigid funeral pose was abandoned after 1625, and religious emotionalism crept into English sculpture. Display of emotion demanded a freer and a more flexible pose. The mourners on the tomb, while frequently being rows of expressionless kneeling figures, from time to time exhibited parental and filial sorrow and deep affection. Dead children were sometimes identified on tombs with labels bearing their Christian names. While monuments exclusively devoted to children were comparatively rare prior to the seventeenth century, Gaignieres's records show that as early as 1584 and 1608 there were some tombs bearing effigies of children on their own. Princess Sophia, who died as a baby in 1606, was commemorated with a tomb by Maxmilian Colt, in the form of a cradle with a child asleep in it.

The challenges presented to the sculptor of the early tombs included problems of proportion and size. While the smaller tombs effectively produced diminutive kneeling figures, wholly free-standing, on top of a ledge, in a prominent position, this arrangement proved inadequate in the case of the larger monuments. The discrepancy arising between the proportions of parents and those of children on funeral monuments of the early sixteenth century were gradually circumvented later in the period. On the tomb of Sir Anthony Cooke (d. 1576), at Romford, the parents are shown as life-size, kneeling figures rather than recumbent, and the children are also presented life-size, kneeling and free-standing, placed upon the top of a ledger. These developments in the presentation of funeral sculptures indicate a general and growing awareness and observation of children, and an attempt to present the relatively separate experiences of the subjects. On a conventional monument of Thomas Andrews (d. 1590), at Charwelton, Northants, the presence of the child is poignantly expressed. While the other descendants kneel in prayer, the youngest daughter is shown, gently bending over her little brother, and holding him to prevent his falling over. Critics have drawn attention to the fact that 'such a rendering of childish artlessness, of a child's innocence of the pomps and ceremonies of her elders' is a significant development in the presentation of childhood in art.[7] Apart from funeral monuments and tombs, images of parents and children also appeared on panels of stained glass in churches.[8]

The religious iconography of childhood in the Middle Ages focused its attention on the significance of the ordinary child. The child at the centre of the Holy Family is the *putto*, a symbolic representation that originated in Italy in the Quattrocento, a curious combination of a figure from antique art and the Christian angel of the Middle Ages.[9] The *putto* was never a historic child but the motif was widely adopted in religious iconography. The *putto* was a decorative device depicted on altars and shrines. He appeared in the guise of a good genius, as a guardian angel, as a playfellow to the Christ-child, accompanying mankind from the cradle to the grave. The *putto* was a stylized presentation of childhood; Christianity idealized childhood and the innocence associated with it. So the *putto* became infant Christ in the works of art by Veronese, Poussin and Francesco Francia. In the hands of some Italian sculptors like Desiderio da Settignano the *putti* became children of varying ages taken directly out of the familiar life of Florence in the Quattrocento. Medieval art customarily represented death and the soul by means of nude child figures long before the child acquired a definite personality or individuality. The departure of the soul from the body and its entry into the world were depicted in terms of naked children, usually sexless. Nebulous, pure and innocent, and fresh from its source, the child served as an excellent symbol of the spirit that could be divorced from the gross matter of everyday life. Thus the *putto* with its *joie de vivre* also brought with it grim, moral implications of good and evil. By a strange process of evolution the *putto* with a skull on medals and woodcuts came to represent death in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.[10] The man who conceived the design was Giovanni Boldu, a Venetian medalist. His medal of 1458 depicts a winged, nude *putto* who reclines on a big skull and clutches a bundle of flames in his left hand. The *putto* appears to be a genius of Death carrying the soul to Heaven. The *putto* with his 'chubby cheeks and dimpled limbs' now assumes an expression of adult maturity and calm. Symbolic children continued to exist in art in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, even in household china - cream jugs, vases, inkstands and so on. The name of Johann Joachim Kaendler (1705-1775) is associated with the best works of this species. Kaendler introduced the European style of relief decoration and figure modelling into this art. Most of these porcelain figures were made between 1740 and 1750 and won great popularity throughout Europe.

The representation of childhood in African art has to be approached from the standpoint that the African concept of childhood is profoundly different from that of the western world. Traditional African societies are not child-centred in the way British and American societies have grown to be. A return to childhood in western societies has been seen

as a return to a certain 'primitivism', before one is circumscribed and crippled by social mores. The theme is a recurrent one in western art and literature - the moving back from age to youth, the preference of untutored naivety and innocence to formally educated maturity. In every case, the rebellion is seen as a surrender of established society and the accepted achievements of civilization. In post-industrial times particularly, it appears to be the case that the figure of the child and childhood experience emerges to embody an ideal seen as antithetical to 'modern life'.

The African artist, it has to be borne in mind, does not work in a context of isolation, alienation, doubt and intellectual conflict, or any such experience which has made the child an attractive artistic and literary theme for the western artist. The African artist is an integral member of the community; he works within an artistic tradition that has developed over several centuries. Most African art, it is assumed, is religious; where it is secular it is maintained that it exists for a specific social purpose - the decorations on masks, the carved handle of a cooking spoon or the symbolic representations on a pot-lid. Such arguments, like the other ethnocentric arguments about African art, are not useful in our appreciation of the works of African artists. Art historians have pointed out that art for art's sake is a relatively recent phenomenon even in the western world - in the past, European art customarily had a social function and purpose, whether it was to please the vanities of a parent who wished to have a portrait of his child painted or to edify the minds of the devout and the faithful.[11]

An important constraint in a study of African art is the lack of sources, commentaries and other documentation to fall back upon. Factors such as the date and place of composition, historical events that took place during the period of composition and so on assist us in our appreciation of western art. These facts are not readily available in the case of African art. Again, a study of traditional African art points to the fact that most African art (with exceptions such as the idealised naturalism of the art style of Ife) is extremely stylized. Hence, the meaning one derives from the sculpture need not necessarily be the meaning the artist intended to convey. It is common knowledge that there were several inhibitions concerning the naturalistic representation of the human face. This included accusations of witchcraft.

It is a significant fact that while realistic and symbolic treatment of childhood crowd the art world in the west, in the twentieth century, children are strangely absent or only marginally present in African art, particularly African sculpture. Like Crivelli's little girl in the periphery of *The Annunciation*, these infants and children peer from behind their mothers' backs or gaze up at the mother while sucking her breast. The

mother-with-child composition appears to be the most frequently adopted form in this context - the theme has been exquisitely treated by individual African artists. The question is repeatedly posed by art critics as to whether the mother-and-child concept was inspired by Christian iconography or by African fertility cults.[12] There seems to be enough evidence to suggest that the theme is rooted in African sociocultural patterns - the exaltation of motherhood is common to many African societies. The Afo *Mother and Child* sculpture presents the mother in a frontal position, seated with her hands on her knees. While one child sits on her shoulders, another sucks her breast. It is interesting to note that the baby at the breast has well-developed breasts herself, and seems to suggest that this composition is not of an ordinary mother and child, but of a female ancestor, the mother of the Afo people. The figure is highly stylized, the elongated neck, scarification marks and the pendulous breasts. Yet another treatment of the mother-and-child image is depicted on the staff carried by a devotee from the temple of Shongo in Ogbomosho. The Yoruba mother in the composition kneels, while her hands are locked behind her, supporting the baby on her back. The child, a miniature version of the mother, clasps the mother securely while looking away from her. The stylization is striking and is in keeping with the aesthetics of Yoruba sculptures - the bulging eyes, the protruding lips and the scarification marks.

An interesting comparison is the *Mother and Child* figures on the staff-top of the Zulu, South Africa. Here, the mother stands erect, slim and serene, while a baby clings desperately to her back. There is a compactness about the mother and the child as a whole which is aesthetically very appealing - they form a harmonious unit on the head of the Zulu staff. It is evident, however, that the emphasis in the composition is on the beauty and dignity of the mother. The child is merely a miniature human figure. The *Mother and Child* image carved in rich, red sandstone by a contemporary Zimbabwean artist, Lazarus Kumalo, is a unique variation on the theme. The figures are squat and compact - the mother in a frontal pose embraces the baby against her breast. M.W. Mount comments on the coarse facial features of the mother and her massive, bulky limbs, and draws attention to the fact that the style is 'reminiscent of some early Romanesque works from provincial European centres'.[13] The baby, curiously enough, is a much more realistic presentation than earlier sculptures of the child.

The striking feature of these Mother-and-Child compositions is that the work as a whole carries symbolic weight and meaning. It may be a celebration of fecundity and motherhood when presented on its own. It may be a realistic portrayal of a common image - the mother with the baby on her back or at her breast. The focus, however, is seldom

on the child in terms of psychological insights or romantic illusions. The Mother-and-Child composition in African art is not solely concerned with the child but is a suitable medium in which the child appears, with varying degrees of maturity and adult composure. Looking at such works of art it has to be remembered that the sculpture before us has little, if anything, to do with the point of view of the African child, or with the child's experience of the world. Unlike the miniature figures on funeral monuments, other diminutive figures in African sculpture cannot be identified altogether as being representations of childhood.

Erhabor Emokpae's highly stylized *Mother and Child* (Nigeria) composition is a culmination of the genre in modern African art. The painting is composed of lines and triangles with a background of an African woman's cooking utensils, presented in a semi-transparent fashion. It is essentially an abstract composition made up of geometric shapes which convey effectively the idea of mother and child.

An interesting variation on the theme is the wood sculpture of a *Father of Twins* (Bangwa, Cameroun), seated, flanked by his twin children, one of either sex. Being miniature replicas of the father figure, the child figures say very little about the nature of childhood or attitudes to childhood in particular African societies. From historic records it is gathered that the birth of twins was of special significance in some African societies - the mother and the father of twins were often honoured by having statues carved of them and their children. Robert Brain comments that 'twin mothers and fathers may become diviners and priestesses - having given birth to little gods they are considered to be appropriate vehicle for supernatural action'.[14]

The child on his own is a rarity in African art. There is a curious absence of anecdotal studies of childhood - a form which has been successfully treated in literary works such as Chukwuemeka Ike's *The Potter's Wheel* and Camara Laye's *The African Child*. Period-pieces of childhood reflecting the social history of individual African societies is a relatively rare and recent phenomenon. The charcoal drawing of *Two Children* by Julian Motau (South Africa) speaks for itself. The composition presents a haunting image of hunger and poverty. The children in the drawing have the wizened expression of men grown old with care and anxiety. Their limbs are emaciated and contorted. Motau's *Mother and Child* composition, also done in charcoal, expresses a similar anguish. The tonal pattern is created by varying the texture of the lines. The pictures prove beyond doubt that Motau's art 'is strongly rooted in social realism'.[15] The dark and putrefying images of horror conveyed by his drawings come disturbingly close to the real situation in South Africa today.

The use of the child as a motif to comment on the goings-on in the adult world can be found in the works of a contemporary South African sculptor and graphic artist, Mslaba Zwelidumile Mxgasi, better known as Dumile. Dumile's *African Guernica*, a charcoal drawing, is a symbolic yearning for a lost innocence that has been replaced by the corruptions of modern African life. The central figures are aptly described as 'apocalyptic in appearance, screaming a message of warning and doom to the modern world'.[16] A detail from the drawing shows an infant feeding from a cow, suggesting as it seems, the harsh realities of life that force mothers to go to work for economic reasons, leaving young children at home. The focus of the drawing is not on the child as such - Dumile's figures seem to exist in a world without perspective or depth - but the presence of the infant adds a certain poignancy to the scene.

The infantile proportions of the wooden figures which stand on boxes containing ancestors' bones of the Fang of Gabon is a curious comment on the eternal life-cycle of humans. The figures are free-standing, a combination of adult torso and head and flexed infantile limbs. The sculptures emphasize the Fang belief that the new-born babe has come from its ancestors - a state of pre-existence that unites the ancestor and the infant. Hence, the contradictions in his physical make up. Teresa Musoke's *Symbols of Birth and New Life* (oil on hardboard, Uganda) and Gerard Sekoto's *Mother and Child* (oil on canvas, South Africa) are other contemporary representations of childhood in art. Children continue to feature in African art but largely through the medium of the Mother-and-Child composition - the form being the most ubiquitous visual phenomenon in traditional African societies. Moreover, motherhood and fecundity are important social values and find their appropriate place in art. Stylization is preferred, generally, to naturalistic and realistic representation in African art. The preciseness and symmetry with which African sculpture is carved has awakened great interest in the western art world. Western art critics are growing to appreciate the intricacies of the African art form, its symbolism and its social function. In the western art scene, the child has been immortalized in visual arts, in portraiture, in sculpture and in the intimate conversation pieces. The child has moved from the periphery to the centre of cultural interest. Artists have captured abundantly the energy and high-spiritedness of childhood; children in their natural daily pursuits, petting animals, playing in the street or asleep in the cradle. The symbolic child in western art is frequently modelled on the real child (as Joshua Reynolds' symbolic children were) and on the artist's observation of the real child. From a relative disregard in its early beginnings, the image of childhood in art indicates a growing awareness of the nature of childhood,

its whims and fancies, and a growing relish in the portrayal of the child as a child. A contemporary Nigerian poet and dramatist, Samson Q.O. Amali, has perceptively conveyed the mother-and-child image in the following poem:[17]

Look at that child,
trotting after his mother
Her strides get wider and wider
faster and faster, unaware.
He quickens his trotting to catch up with her;
The more he tries,
The more the gap she leaves behind her for him.

Life contains both her and him.
Both share life, take out of life their own share
give to life what they have.

She strides on gracefully for her child and herself
unaware
Her child still follows her
They shall never level
And even if they level
They shall never be the same
For life and nature have separated them eternally

One contains the other
And each shall remain a distinct self
A mother and her child.

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1. Muriel G. Shine, *The Fictional Children of Henry James* (North Carolina, 1969), p. 3.
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3. *The World We Have Lost* (London, 1971), p. 110.
4. Ibid., p. 111.
5. See Peter Fuller, 'Uncovering Childhood', *Changing Childhood*, ed. Martin Hoyles (London, 1979), pp. 79-80.
6. Philippe Aries, *Centuries of Childhood* (Harmondsworth, 1973), p. 38.
7. Eric Mercer, *English Art 1553-1625* (Oxford, 1962), p. 242. I am indebted to Mercer for his excellent discussion of funeral monuments.
8. For a discussion of the Verney Family on stained glass, formerly in the chapel at Compton Verney, Warwickshire, see H.T. Kirby, 'The Compton Verney Glass', *Country Life* (April 1954), 1132-1133.
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11. Frank Willett, *African Art* (London, 1975).
12. Eugene Roosens, *Images Africaines de la mère et l'enfant* (Paris, 1967).
13. *African Art: the Years Since 1920* (Bloomington, 1973), p. 25.
14. *Art and Society in Africa* (London, 1980), p. 196.
15. E.J. De Jager, 'Five South African Artists', *African Arts*, Vol. XI, No. 2 (January 1978), 50.
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17. 'Strides', *Worlds within Worlds and other Poems* (Ibadan, 1970), p. 13.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

KAY SCHAFFER teaches at the South Australian College of Advanced Education. Her most recent publication is *Woman and the Bush: Forces of Desire in the Australian Cultural Tradition* (Cambridge University Press, 1988).

KIRSTEN HOLST PETERSEN specializes in the field of post-colonial studies and has published widely in this area.

HELEN M. GILBERT is a graduate of the University of British Columbia and is now doing post-graduate work at the University of Queensland.

W.D. ASHCROFT teaches at the University of New South Wales. He is co-author with Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin of *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, published in 1989 by Routledge. He is co-editor with Paul Sharrard of *New Literature Review*.

JAN OWEN - Australian poet. Her next collection of poems is about to be published.

RIEMKE ENSING is a New Zealand poet of Dutch origin.

SUSAN HAWTHORNE is a literary editor with Penguin, Australia, and one of the co-organizers of the Australian Women Writers' Festival. She is co-editor with Jenny Pausacker of *Moments of Desire* (Penguin), an anthology of fiction, prose and poetry that explores women's sexuality from a feminist point of view.

CARYL PHILLIPS is an award-winning novelist and playwright. His most recent novel, *Higher Ground* (Viking), has just been released in paperback.

CRAIG TAPPING has taught in Nigeria, Ireland and Canada. He specializes in post-colonial literature and theory.

KAMAU BRATHWAITE (Edward Kamau Brathwaite) is one of the major poets of the twentieth century. His collections of poetry are published by Oxford University Press. He is also a critic and a historian and teaches history at the University of the West Indies, Jamaica.

DAN JACOBSON - South African novelist who now lives in England.

STEPHEN GRAY is a South African novelist, poet, playwright and critic.

STEPHEN HEIGHTON is a Canadian poet. His first collection, *Stalin's Carnival*, was published by Quarry Press. His most recent collection, *Foreign Ghosts*, has recently been published by Oberon Press and will be reviewed in the next issue of *Kunapipi*.

CATHERINE J. FENN is a graduate of the University of British Columbia. She is currently a doctoral student at York University, Toronto, studying post-colonial literature and critical theory.

JOHN HAYNES taught for many years at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria. He is now teaching in England.
DEREK WRIGHT teaches at the Northern Territory University, Australia. His most recent publication is *Ayi Kwei Armah's Africa: the Sources of His Fiction* (K.G. Saur Verlag, 1989), which will be reviewed in the next issue of *Kunapipi*.
KANCHANA UGBABE is an Indian national married to a Nigerian. Dr Ugbabe has a doctorate from Adelaide University and is presently lecturing at the University of Jos, Nigeria.

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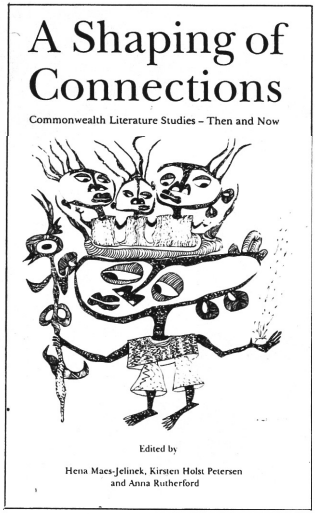

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